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CIPHER SIX
THE YELLOW RIBBON
TWO IN A TANGLE
THE RAINBOW MYSTERY

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SECRET SERVICE

BY

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

FROM THE PLAY BY

WILLIAM GILLETTE



HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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BOOK I

WHAT HAPPENED AT EIGHT O'CLOCK

CHAPTER I

THE BATTERY PASSES

Outside, the softness of an April night; the verdure of tree and lawn, the climbing roses, already far advanced in that southern latitude, sweetly silvered in the moonlight. Within the great old house apparently an equal calm.

Yet, neither within nor without was the night absolutely soundless. Far away to the southward the cloudless horizon, easily visible from the slight eminence on which the house stood, was marked by quivering flashes of lurid light. From time to time, the attentive ear might catch the roll, the roar, the reverberation of heavy sound like distant thunder-peals intermingled with sharper detonations. The flashes came from great guns, and the rolling peals were the sound of the cannon, the detonations explosions of the shells. There was the peace of God in the heaven above; there were the passions of men on the earth beneath.

Lights gleamed here and there, shining through the twining rose foliage, from the windows of the old house, which stood far back from the street. From a room on one side of the hall, which opened from the broad pillared portico of Colonial fashion, a hum of voices arose.

A group of women, with nervous hands and

anxious faces, working while they talked, were picking lint, tearing linen and cotton for bandages. Their conversation was not the idle chatter of other days. They "told sad stories of the death of kings!" How "Tom" and "Charles" and "Allen" and "Page" and "Burton" had gone down into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, whence they had not come back. How this fort had been hammered yesterday, the other, the day before. How So-and-So's wounds had been ministered to. How Such-a-One's needs had been relieved. How the enemy were drawing closer and closer and closer, and how they were being held back with courage, which, alas! by that time was the courage of despair. And much of their speech was of their own kind, of bereft woman and fatherless children. And ever as they talked, the busy fingers flew.

Upstairs from one of the front rooms the light shone dimly through a window partly covered by a half-drawn Venetian blind. One standing at the side of the house and listening would have heard out of the chamber low moanings, muttered words from feverish lips and delirious brain. The meaningless yet awful babble was broken now and again by words of tenderness and anguish. Soft hands were laid on the burning brow of the poor sufferer within, while a mother's eyes dropped tears upon bloodstained bandages and wasted frame.

And now the gentle wind which swept softly through the trees bore a sudden sharper, stranger sound toward the old house in the garden. The tramp of horse, the creak of wheels, the faint jingling of arms and sabres drew nearer and rose louder. Sudden words of command punctured

the night. Here came a battery, without the rattle of drum or the blare of bugles, with no sound but its own galloping it rolled down the street. Lean, gaunt horses were ridden and driven by leaner and gaunter men in dusty, worn, ragged, tattered uniforms. Only the highly polished brass guns—twelve-pounder Napoleons —gleamed bright in the moonlight.

The sewing women came out on the porch and the blind of the window above was lifted and a white-haired woman stood framed in the light.

No, those watchers did not cheer as the battery swept by on its way to the front. For one thing, a soldier lay upstairs dying; for another, they had passed the time when they cheered that tattered flag. Now they wept over it as one weeps as he beholds for the last time the face of a friend who dies. Once they had acclaimed it as the sunrise in the morning, now they watched it silently go inevitably to the sunset of defeat.

The men did not cheer either. They were not past cheering—oh, no! They were made of rougher stuff than the women, and the time would come when, in final action, they would burst forth into that strange, wild yell that struck terror to the hearts of the hearers. They could cheer even in the last ditch, even in the jaws of death—face the end better for their cheering perhaps; but women are more silent in the crisis. They bear and give no tongue.

The officer in command saw the little group of women on the porch. The moonlight shone from the street side and high-lighted them, turning the rusty black of most of the gowns, homedyed mourning,—all that could be come at in those last awful days in Richmond,—into soft shadows,

above which their faces shone angelic. He saw the woman's head in the window, too. He knew who lay upon the bed of death within the chamber. He had helped to bring him back from the front several days before. He bit his lips for a moment and then, ashamed of his emotion, his voice rang harsh. With arm and sabre the battery saluted the women and passed on, while from the window of the great drawing-room, opposite the room of the lint-pickers and bandage-tearers, a slender boy stared and stared after the disappearing guns, his eyes full of envy and vexatious tears as he stamped his foot in futile protest and disappointment.

The noise made by the passing cannon soon died away in the distance. Stillness supervened as before; workers whispered together, realising that some of those passing upon whom they had looked would pass no more, and that they would look upon them never again. Upstairs the moans of the wounded man had died away; the only thing that persisted was the fearful thundering of the distant guns around beleaguered Petersburg. Within the drawing-room, the boy walked up and down restlessly, muttering to himself, evidently nerving himself to desperate resolution.

"I won't do it," he said. "I won't stay here any longer."

He threw up his hands and turned to the portraits that adorned the room, portraits that carried one back through centuries to the days of the first cavalier of the family, who crossed the seas to seek his fortune in a new land, and it was a singular thing that practically every one of them wore a sword.

"You all fought," said the boy passionately, "and I am going to."

The door at the other end was softly opened. The great room was but dimly lighted by candles in sconces on the wall; the great chandelier was not lighted for lack of tapers, but a more brilliant radiance was presently cast over the apartment by the advent of old Martha. She had been the boy's "Mammy" and the boy's father's "Mammy" as well, and no one dared to speculate how much farther into the past she ran back.

"Is dat you, Mars Wilfred?" said the old woman, waddling into the room, both hands extended, bearing two many-branched candlesticks, which she proceeded to deposit upon the handsome mahogany tables with which the long drawing-room was furnished.

"Yes, it is I, Aunt Martha. Did you see Benton's Battery go by?"

"Lawd lub you, chile, Ah done seen so many guns an' hosses an' soljahs a-gwine by Ah don't tek no notice ob 'em no mo'. 'Peahs lak dey keep on a-passin' by fo' ebah."

"Well, there won't be many more of them pass by," said the boy in a clear accent, but with that soft intonation which would have betrayed his Southern ancestry anywhere, "and before they are all gone, I would like to join one of them myself."

"Why, my po' li'l lamb!" exclaimed Martha, her arms akimbo, "dat Ah done nussed in dese ahms, is you gwine to de fight?"

The boy's demeanour was anything but lamb-like. He made a fierce step toward her.

"Don't you call me 'lamb' any more," he said, "it's ridiculous and——"

Mammy Martha started back in alarm.

"'Peahs mo' lak a lion 'd be better," she admitted.

"Where's mother?" asked the boy, dismissing the subject as unworthy of argument.

"I reckon she's upstaihs wid Mars Howard, suh. Yo' bruddah——"

"I want to see her right away," continued the boy impetuously.

"Mars Howard he's putty bad dis ebenin'," returned Martha. "Ah bettah go an' tell her dat you want her, but Ah dunno's she'd want to leab him."

"Well, you tell her to come as soon as she can. I'm awfully sorry for Howard, but it's living men that the Confederacy needs most now."

"Yas, suh," returned the old nurse, with a quizzical look out of her black eyes at the slender boy before her. "Dey suah does need men," she continued, and as the youngster took a passionate step toward her, she deftly passed out of the room and closed the door behind her, and he could hear her ponderous footsteps slowly and heavily mounting the steps.

The boy went to the window again and stared into the night. In his preoccupation he did not catch the sound of a gentler footfall upon the stairs, nor did he notice the opening of the door and the silent approach of a woman, the woman with white hair who had stood at the window. The mother of a son dead, a son dying, and a son living. No distinctive thing that in the Confederacy. Almost any mother who had more than one boy could have been justly so characterised. She stopped half-way down the room

and looked lovingly and longingly at the slight, graceful figure of her youngest son. Her eyes filled with tears—for the dying or the living or both? Who can say? She went toward him, laid her hand on his shoulder. He turned instantly and at the sight of her tears burst out quickly:

"Howard isn't worse, is he?" for a moment forgetful of all else.

The woman shook her head.

"I am afraid he is. The sound of that passing battery seemed to excite him so. He thought he was at the front again and wanted to get up."

"Poor old Howard!"

"He's quieter now, perhaps——"

"Mother, is there anything I can do for him?"

"No, my son," answered the woman with a sigh, "I don't think there is anything that anybody can do. We can only wait—and hope. He is in God's hands, not ours."

She lifted her face for a moment and saw beyond the room, through the night, and beyond the stars a Presence Divine, to Whom thousands of other women in that dying Confederacy made daily, hourly, and momentary prayers. Less exalted, more human, less touched, the boy bowed his head, not without his own prayer, too.

"But you wanted to see me, Wilfred, Martha said," the woman presently began.

"Yes, mother, I——"

The boy stopped and the woman was in no hurry to press him. She divined what was coming and would fain have avoided it all.

"I am thankful there is a lull in the cannonading," she said, listening. "I wonder why it has stopped?"

"It has not stopped," said Wilfred, "at least it has gone on all evening."

"I don't hear it now."

"No, but you will—there!"

"Yes, but compared to what it was yesterday—you know how it shook the house—and Howard suffered so through it."

"So did I," said the boy in a low voice fraught with passion.

"You, my son?"

"Yes, mother, when I hear those guns and know that the fighting is going on, it fairly maddens me——"

But Mrs. Varney hastily interrupted her boy. Woman-like she would thrust from her the decision which she knew would be imposed upon her.

"Yes, yes," she said; "I know how you suffered,—we all suffered, we——" She turned away, sat down in a chair beside the table, leaned her head in her hands, and gave way to her emotions. "There has been nothing but suffering, suffering since this awful war began," she murmured.

"Mother," said Wilfred abruptly, "I want to speak to you. You don't like it, of course, but you have just got to listen this time."

Mrs. Varney lifted her head from her hands. Wilfred came nearer to her and dropped on his knees by her side. One hand she laid upon his shoulder, the other on his face. She stared down into his up-turned face.

"I know—I know, my boy—what you want."

"I can't stay here any longer," said the youth; "it is worse than being shot to pieces. I just have to chain myself to the floor whenever I

hear a cannon-shot or see a soldier. When can I go ? "

The woman stared at him. In him she saw faintly the face of the boy dying upstairs. In him she saw the white face of the boy who lay under the sun and dew, dead at Seven Pines. In him she saw all her kith and kin, who, true to the traditions of that house, had given up their lives for a cause now practically lost. She could not give up the last one. She drew him gently to her, but, boy-like, he disengaged himself and drew away with a shake of his head, not that he loved his mother the less, but honour—as he saw it—the more.

" Why don't you speak ? " he whispered at last.

" I don't know what to say to you, Wilfred," faltered his mother, although there was but one thing to say, and she knew that she must say it, yet she was fighting, woman-like, for time.

" I will tell you what to say," said the boy.

" What ? "

" Say that you won't mind if I go down to Petersburg and enlist."

" But that would not be true, Wilfred," said his mother, smiling faintly.

" True or not, mother, I can't stay here."

" Oh, Wilfred, Russell has gone, and Howard is going, and now you want to go and get killed."

" I don't want to be killed at all, mother."

" But you are so young, my boy."

" Not younger than Tom Kittridge," answered the boy ; " not younger than Ell Stuart or Cousin Steven or hundreds of other boys down there. See, mother—they have called for all over eighteen, weeks ago ; the seventeen call may be out any

moment; the next one after that takes me. Do you want me to stay here until I am ordered out! I should think not. Where's your pride?"

"My pride? Ah, my son, it's on the battlefield, over at Seven Pines, and upstairs with Howard."

"Well, I don't care, mother," he persisted obstinately, "I love you and all that, you know it,—but I can't stand this. I've got to go. I must go."

Mrs. Varney recognised from the ring of determination in the boy's voice that his mind was made up. She could no longer hold him. With or without her consent he would go, and why should she withhold it? Other boys as young as hers had gone and had not come back. Aye, there was the rub: she had given one, the other trembled on the verge, and now the last one! Yes, he must go, too,—to live or die as God pleased. If they wanted her to sacrifice everything on the altar of her country, she had her own pride, she would do it, as hundreds of other women had done. She rose from her chair and went toward her boy. He was a slender lad of sixteen but was quite as tall as she. As he stood there he looked strangely like his father, thought the woman.

"Well," she said at last, "I will write to your father and——"

"But," the boy interrupted in great disappointment, "that'll take for ever. You never can tell where his brigade is from day to day. I can't wait for you to do that."

"Wilfred," said his mother, "I can't let you go without his consent. You must be patient. I will write the letter at once, and we will send

it by a special messenger. You ought to hear by to-morrow."

The boy turned away impatiently and strode toward the door.

"Wilfred," said his mother gently. The tender appeal in her voice checked him. She came over to him and put her arm about his shoulders. "Don't feel bad, my boy, that you have to stay another day with your mother. It may be many days, you know, before——"

"It isn't that," said Wilfred.

"My darling boy—I know it. You want to fight for your country—and I'm proud of you. I want my sons to do their duty. But with your father at the front, one boy dead, and the other wounded, dying——"

She turned away.

"You will write father to-night, won't you?"

"Yes—yes!"

"I'll wait, then, until we have had time to get a reply," said the boy.

"Yes, and then you will go away. I know what your father's answer will be. The last of my boys—Oh, God, my boys!"

CHAPTER II

A COMMISSION FROM THE PRESIDENT

THE door giving entrance to the hall was opened unceremoniously by the rotund and privileged Martha. She came at an opportune time, relieving the tension between the mother and son. Wilfred was not insensible to his mother's feelings, but he was determined to go to the front. He was glad of the interruption and rather shamefacedly took advantage of it by leaving the room.

"Well, Martha, what is it?" asked Mrs. Varney, striving to regain her composure.

"Dere's one ob de men fum de hossiple heah, ma'am."

"Another one?"

"Ah declare to goodness, ma'am, dey jes' keeps a-comin' an' a'comin.' 'Peahs like we cain't keep no close fo' ourse'f; de sheets an' tablecloths an' napkins an' eben de young misstess' petticoats, dey all hab to go."

"And we have just sent all the bandages we have," said Mrs. Varney, smiling.

"Den we got to git some mo'. Dey says dey's all used up, an' two mo' trains jes' come in crowded full o' wounded sojahs—an' mos' all ob 'em dreffful bad!"

"Is Miss Kittridge here yet, Martha?"

"Yas'm, Ah jes' seen her goin' through de hall into de libr'y."

"Ask her if they have anything to send. Even if it's only a little let them have it. What they need most is bandages. There are some in Howard's room, too. Give them half of what you find there. I think what we have left will last long enough to—to——"

"Yas'm," said old Martha, sniffing. "Ah'm a-gwine. Does you want to see de man?"

"Yes, send him in," said Mrs. Varney.

There was a light tap on the door after Martha went out.

"Come in," said the mistress of the house, and there came in a battered and dilapidated specimen of young humanity, his arm in a sling. "My poor man!" exclaimed Mrs. Varney. "Sit down."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"Martha," she called to the old woman, who paused at the door on her way to the stairs, "can't you get something to eat and drink for this gentleman?"

"Well, the pantry ain't obahflowin', as you know, Mrs. Varney. But Ah reckon Ah might fin' a glass o' milk ef Ah jes' had to."

"All our wine has gone long ago," said Mrs. Varney to the soldier, "but if a glass of milk——"

"I haven't seen a glass of milk for three years, ma'am," answered the man, smiling; "it would taste like nectar."

"Martha will set it for you in the dining-room while you are waiting. What hospital did you come from, by the way?"

"The Winder, ma'am."

"And is it full?"

"They are laying them on blankets on the floor. You can hardly step for wounded men."

"I suppose you need everything?"

"Everything, but especially bandages."

"Have you been over to St. Paul's Church? The ladies are working there to-night."

"Yes, ma'am, I've been over there, but they're not working for the hospital; they're making sand-bags for fortifications."

"And where are you from?"

"I'm a Louisiana Tiger, ma'am," answered the man proudly.

"You don't look much like it now," said the woman, smiling.

"No, I guess the lamb is more like me now, but just wait until I get well enough to go to the front again," admitted the soldier cheerfully.

At this moment one of the ladies who had been working in the other room came in carrying a small packet of bandages done up in a coarse brown paper.

"Oh, Miss Kittridge," said Mrs. Varney, "here is the gentleman who——"

Miss Kittridge was a very business-like person.

"This is every scrap we have," she said, handing the soldier the parcel with a little bow. "If you will come back in an hour or two, perhaps we shall have more for you."

"Thank you, ladies, and God bless you. I don't know what our poor fellows in the hospitals would do if it weren't for you."

"Don't forget your milk in the dining-room," said Mrs. Varney.

"I'm not likely to, ma'am," returned the soldier, as in spite of his wounded arm he bowed gracefully to the women.

In the hall Martha's voice could be heard exclaiming :

"Come right dis way, you po' chile, an' see what Ah's got fo' you in de dinin'-room."

"You must be tired to death," said Mrs. Varney to Miss Kittridge, looking at the white face of the other woman. Her brother had been killed a few days before, but the clods had scarcely rattled down upon his coffin before she was energetically at work again—for other women's brothers.

"No, no," she said bravely ; "and our tiredness is nothing compared to the weariness of our men. We are going to stay late to-night, Mrs. Varney, if you will let us. There's so many more wounded come in it won't do to stop now. We have found some old linen that will make splendid bandages, and——"

"My dear girl," said the matron, "stay as long as you possibly can. I will see if Martha can't serve you something to eat after a while. I don't believe there is any tea left in the house."

"Bread and butter will be a feast," said Miss Kittridge.

"And I don't believe there is much butter either," smiled the older woman.

"Well, it doesn't matter," said the other. "Is—is your son—is there any change ? "

"Not for the better," was the reply. "I am afraid his fever is increasing."

"And has the surgeon seen him this evening ? "

"Not to-night."

"Why not ? " exclaimed Miss Kittridge in great surprise. "Surely his condition is sufficiently critical to demand more than one brief visit in the morning."

"I can't ask him to come twice with so many waiting for him," said Mrs. Varney.

"But they would not refuse you, Mrs. Varney," said Miss Kittridge quickly. "There's that man going back to the hospital, he's in the dining-room yet. I'll call him and send word that——"

She started impulsively toward the door, but Mrs. Varney caught her by the arm.

"No," she said firmly; "I can't let you."

"Not for your own son?"

"I am thinking of the sons of other mothers. The surgeon has done all that he can for him. And think how many other sons would have to be neglected if he visited mine twice. He will come again to-morrow."

The second woman stood looking at her in mingled sympathy and amazement, and there was a touch of pride in her glance, too. She was proud of her sex, and she had a right to be there in Richmond that spring, if ever.

"I understand," said Miss Kittridge at last. "I suppose you are right."

They stared at each other, white-faced, a moment, when there entered to them youth and beauty incarnate. There was enough resemblance between the pale, white-haired mother and the girlish figure in the doorway to proclaim their relationship. The girl's cheek had lost some of its bloom and some of its roundness. There was too much that was appalling and fearful in and about Richmond then not to leave its mark even upon the most youthful and the most buoyant, yet things did not come home to the young as they did to those older. She was still a lovely picture, especially in the soft radiance of the candles. She carried her hat in her hand.

The flowers upon it were assuredly those of yesteryear, it would not have passed muster as the mode anywhere except in besieged Richmond; and her dress, although it fitted her perfectly, was worn and faded and had been darned and patched and altered until it was quite beyond further change, yet she wore it as airily as if it had been tissue of silver or cloth of gold.

The mother's face brightened.

"Edith dear," she exclaimed, "how late you are! It is after eight o'clock. You must be tired out."

"I am not tired at all," answered the girl cheerily. "I have not been at the hospital all afternoon; this is my day off. How is Howard?"

"I wish I could say just the same, but he seems a little worse."

The girl's face went suddenly grave. She stepped over to her mother, took her hand and patted it softly.

"Is there nothing you can do?"

"My dear," said her mother, "Howard—we—are all in God's hands."

She drew a long breath and lifted her head bravely.

"Miss Kittridge," said the girl, "I have something very important to tell mother, and——"

Miss Kittridge smiled back at her.

"I am going at once, honey. There is lots of work for us to do and——"

"You don't mind, I hope," said Edith Varney, calling after her as she went into the hall.

"No, indeed," was the reply.

Mrs. Varney sat down wearily by the table, and Edith pulled up a low stool and sat at her feet.

"Well, my dear?"

"Mamma—what do you think? What do you think?"

"I think a great many things," said Mrs. Varney, "but——"

"Yes, but you wouldn't ever think of this."

"Certainly I shall not, unless you tell me."

"Well, I have been to see the President."

"The President—Mr. Davis!"

"Yes."

"And what did you go to see the President for?"

"I asked him for an appointment for Captain Thorne."

"For Captain Thorne! My dear——"

"Yes, mother, for the War Departmental Telegraph Service. And he gave it to me, a special commission. He gave it to me for father's sake and for Captain Thorne's sake,—he has met him and likes him,—and for my own."

"What sort of an appointment?"

"Appointing him to duty here in Richmond, a very important position. He won't be sent to the front, and he will be doing his duty just the same."

"But, Edith, you don't—you can't——"

"Yes, it will, mother. The President,—I just love him,—told me they needed a man who understood telegraphing and who was of high enough rank to take charge of the service. As you know, most of the telegraph operators are privates, and Captain Thorne is an expert. Since he's been here in Richmond he's helped them in the telegraph office often. Lieutenant Foray told me so."

Mrs. Varney rose and moved away. Edith followed her.

"Now, mamma!" she exclaimed; "I feel you are going to scold me, and you must not, because it's all fixed and the commission will be sent over here in a few minutes—just as soon as it can be made out—and when it comes I am going to give it to him myself."

Mrs. Varney moved over toward the table and lifted a piece of paper, evidently a note.

"He is coming this evening," she said.

"How do you know?" asked her daughter.

"Well, for one thing," said her mother, "I can remember very few evenings when he hasn't been here since he was able to walk out of the hospital."

"Mamma!"

"And for another thing, this note came about half an hour ago."

"Is it for me?"

"For me, my dear, else I shouldn't have opened it. You can read it, if you like."

"Has it been here all this time?" exclaimed Edith jealously.

"All this time. You will see what he says. This will be his last call; he has his orders to leave."

"Why, it's too ridiculous!" said the girl; "just as if the commission from the President wouldn't supersede everything else. It puts him at the head of the Telegraph Service. He will be in command of the Department. He says it is a good-bye call, does he?" She looked at the note again and laughed, "All the better, it will be that much more of a surprise. Now, mamma, don't you breathe a word about it, I want to tell him myself."

"But, Edith dear—I am sorry to criticise you—but I don't at all approve of your going to the

President about this. It doesn't seem quite the proper thing for a young lady to interest herself so far——"

"But listen, mamma," and as she spoke the light went out of Miss Edith's face at her mother's grave and somewhat reproving aspect. "I couldn't go to the War Department people. Mr. Arrelsford is there in one of the offices, and ever since I—I refused him, you know how he has treated me! If I had applied for anything there, it would have been refused at once, and he would have got them to order Captain Thorne away right off. I know he would—why, that is where his orders came from!"

"But, my dear——"

"That is where they came from. Isn't it lucky I got that commission to-day. There's the bell; I wonder who it can be?" She stopped and listened while the door opened and Jonas, the butler, entered. "Is it Captain Thorne?" asked Edith eagerly.

"No, ma'am."

"Oh!"

"It's another offiisuh, ma'am. He says he's fum de President an' he's got to see Miss Edith pussonally."

Jonas extended a card which, as he spoke, Edith took and glanced at indifferently.

"Lieutenant Maxwell," she read.

"Ask the gentleman in, Jonas," said Mrs. Varney.

"It's come," whispered Edith to her mother.

"Do you know who he is?"

"No—but he's from the President—it must be that commission."

At this moment old Jonas ushered into the

drawing-room a very dashing young officer, handsome in face, gallant in bearing, and dressed in a showy and perfectly fitting uniform, which was quite a contrast to the worn habiliments of the men at the front. Mrs. Varney stepped forward a little, and Lieutenant Maxwell bowed low before her.

"Good-evening, ma'am. Have I the honour of addressing Miss Varney?"

"I am Mrs. Varney, sir."

"Madam," said the Lieutenant, "I am very much afraid this looks like an intrusion on my part, but I come from the President, and he desires me to see Miss Varney personally."

"Any one from the President could not be otherwise than welcome, sir. This is my daughter Edith, let me present Lieutenant Maxwell."

The young Lieutenant, greatly impressed, bowed profoundly before her, and taking a large brown envelope from his belt, handed it to her.

"Miss Varney," he said, "the President directed me to deliver this into your hands, with his compliments. He is glad to be able to do this, he says, not only at your request, but because of your father and for the merits of the gentleman in question."

"Oh, thank you," cried the girl, taking the envelope.

"Won't you be seated, Lieutenant Maxwell?" said Mrs. Varney.

"Yes, do," urged the girl, holding the envelope pressed very tightly to her side.

"Nothing would please me so much, ladies," answered the Lieutenant, "but I must go back to the President's house right away. I'm on duty this evening. Would you mind writing me

off a line or two, Miss Varney, just to say you have received the communication ? "

" Why, certainly, you want a receipt. I'll go upstairs to my desk ; it won't take a moment. And could I put in how much I thank him for his kindness ? "

" I am sure he would be more than pleased," smiled Lieutenant Maxwell, as Edith left the room and hastened up the stairs.

" We haven't heard so much cannonading to-day, Lieutenant," said Mrs. Varney. " Do you know what it means ? "

" I don't think they are quite positive, ma'am, but they can't help looking for a violent attack to follow."

" I don't see why it should quiet down before an assault."

" Well, there is always a calm before a storm," said the Lieutenant. " It might be some signal, or it might be they are moving their batteries to open on some special point of attack. They are trying every way to break through our defences, you know."

" It's very discouraging. We can't seem to drive them back this time."

" We're holding them where they are, though," said Maxwell proudly. " They'll never get in unless they do it by some scurvy trick ; that's where the danger lies. We are always looking out for it, and——"

At this moment Edith Varney re-entered the room. She had left her hat upstairs with the official-looking envelope, and had taken time to glance at a mirror and then to thrust a red rose in her dark hair. The impressionable young Lieutenant thought she looked prettier than ever.

"Lieutenant Maxwell," she said, extending a folded paper, "here is your receipt——"

The butler's words to some one in the hall interrupted her further speech.

"Will you jes' kin'ly step dis way, suh!" she heard Jonas say, and as Edith turned she found herself face to face with Captain Thorne!

CHAPTER III

ORDERS TO CAPTAIN THORNE

On the sleeves of Captain Thorne's coat the insignia of a Captain of Confederate Artillery were displayed; his uniform was worn, soiled, and ill-fitting, giving honourable evidence of hard service; his face was pale and thin and showed signs of recent illness, from which he had scarcely recovered. In every particular he was a marked contrast to Lieutenant Maxwell.

"Miss Varney," he said, bowing low.

"We were expecting you," answered Edith, giving her hand to Thorne. "Here's Captain Thorne, mamma!"

Mrs. Varney shook hands with him graciously while her daughter turned once more to the other man, with the acknowledgment of the order, which she handed to him.

"I wasn't so very long writing it, was I, Lieutenant Maxwell?" she asked.

"I've never seen a quicker piece of work, Miss Varney," returned that young man, putting the note in his belt and smiling as he did so. "When you want a clerkship over at the Government offices, you must surely let me know."

"You would better not commit yourself," said Edith jestingly; "I might take you at your word."

"Nothing would please me more," was the prompt answer. "All you have got to do is just apply, and refer to me, of course."

"Lots of the other girls are doing it," continued Edith half-seriously. "They have to live. Aren't there a good many where you are?"

"Well, we don't have so many as they do over at the Treasury. I believe there are more ladies over there than men. And now I must go."

"A moment," said Mrs. Varney, coming forward with Thorne. "Do you gentlemen know each other?"

Captain Thorne shook his head and stepped forward, looking intently at the other.

"Let me have the pleasure of making you acquainted, then. Captain Thorne—Lieutenant Maxwell."

Thorne slowly inclined his head. Maxwell also bowed.

"I have not had the pleasure of meeting Captain Thorne before, although I have heard of him a great many times," he said courteously.

"Yes?" answered the other, who seemed to be a man of few words.

"In fact, Captain, there is a gentleman in one of our offices who seems mighty anxious to pick a fight with you."

"Really!" exclaimed Captain Thorne, smiling somewhat sarcastically; "pick a fight with me! To what office do you refer, sir?"

"The War Office, sir," said Lieutenant Maxwell, rather annoyed, he could not exactly say why.

"Dear, dear!" continued Thorne urbanely; "I didn't suppose there was anybody in the War Office who wanted to fight!"

"And why not, sir?" asked Lieutenant Maxwell, haughtily, while Edith barely stifled a laugh, and her mother even smiled.

"Well, if he wanted to fight, he'd hardly be in an office at a time like this, would he?"

Captain Thorne's sarcasm seemed to perturb the youngster, but his good breeding got the better of his annoyance.

"I'd better not tell him that, Captain," he said with a great effort at lightness; "he would certainly insist upon having you out."

"That would be too bad," said the Captain. "It might interfere with his office hours and——"

"He doesn't believe it, Miss Varney," said Maxwell, turning to the younger woman, "but it is certainly true. I dare say you know the gentleman——"

"Please don't, Lieutenant," interrupted Edith quickly. "I would rather not talk about it, if you please."

"Of course," said Maxwell, "I didn't know there was anything——"

"Yes," said Edith. "Let's talk about something else. You know there is always the weather to fall back on——"

"I should say so," laughed the Lieutenant, "and mighty bad weather for us, too."

"Yes, isn't it?"

They turned away, talking and laughing somewhat constrainedly, while Mrs. Varney picked up the note that was still lying on the table.

"From your note, I suppose you are leaving us immediately, Captain Thorne. Your orders have come?"

"Yes, Mrs. Varney," said the Captain. "I am afraid this must be the last of my pleasant calls."

"Isn't it rather sudden? Are you quite well? It seems to me they ought to give you a little more time to recover."

"I have no doubt that I am, or feel, much better than I look," said the Captain, "and we have to be ready for anything, you know. I have been idle too long already."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Mrs. Varney. "Well, it has been a great pleasure to have you call upon us. When you are away, we shall greatly miss your visits."

"Thank you; I shall never forget what they have been to me."

"Lieutenant Maxwell is going, mamma," said Edith.

"So soon! Please excuse me a moment, Captain. I am very sorry you have to hurry away, Lieutenant; we shall hope for the pleasure of seeing you again, if your duties permit."

"I shall certainly avail myself of your invitation, if you will allow me." He saluted Captain Thorne. "Good-evening, sir."

Thorne, of course, returned the courteous salute of his junior.

"Lieutenant Maxwell," he said pleasantly, as Mrs. Varney followed Lieutenant Maxwell into the hall.

"Now remember, you are to come some time when duty doesn't call you away so soon," she said, as he bowed himself out.

"Trust me not to forget that, Mrs. Varney," said the Lieutenant, as he disappeared on the porch.

Captain Thorne and Edith were left alone. The girl stepped over to a small table on which stood a vase of roses, and, with somewhat nervous

hands, she busied herself arranging them. The young officer watched her in silence for a little while, the moments tense with emotion.

"Shall I see Mrs. Varney again?" he began at last.

"Oh, I suppose so, but not now. I heard her go upstairs to Howard."

"How is he?"

"Desperately ill."

"I am sorry."

"Yes," said the girl.

"I have a very little time to stay and——"

"Oh—not long?" asked Edith.

"No, I am sorry to say."

"Well, do you know," she looked at him archly, "I believe you will have more time than you really think you have. It would be odd if it came out that way, wouldn't it?" she continued, as she played with the flower in her hand.

"Yes, but it won't come out that way," said Thorne, as he stepped closer to her.

"You don't know," she faltered, as Thorne drew the flower from her and took her hand in his. They stood there quiet a moment, and she did not draw her hand away. "Well, it makes no difference how soon you are going away; you can sit down in the meantime if you want to."

"It is hardly worth while," he said; "my time is so short."

"You would better," interrupted the girl; "I have a great many things to say to you."

"Have you?" he asked, sitting down on the little sofa by her side in compliance with her invitation.

"Yes."

"But I have only one thing to say to you—Miss Varney and—that is"—Thorne took her other hand in both of his—"good-bye."

Very different words had trembled on his lips, as he knew and as the girl knew..

"But I don't really think you will have to say that, Captain Thorne," said Edith slowly.

"I know I will."

"Then," said Edith more softly, "it will be because you want to say it."

"No," said Thorne, resolutely and of his own motion releasing her hands, which she had allowed him to hold without remonstrance; "it will be because I must."

He rose to his feet and took up his hat from the table, as if the thing being settled, he had only to go. But the girl observed with secret joy that he made no other effort at departure.

"Oh, you think you must, do you, Captain Thorne?" said Edith, looking up at him mischievously. "You are a very wise person, but you don't know all that I know."

"I think that is more than likely, Miss Varney, but won't you tell me some of the things that you know that I don't, so that I can approach your knowledge in that respect?"

"I wouldn't mind telling you one thing, and that is that it is very wrong for you to think of leaving Richmond now."

"Oh, but you don't know."

"Yes, I do."

"Well, what do you know?" asked Thorne curiously.

"Whatever you were going to say. Most likely it was that there's something or other I don't know about, but I do know this. You

were sent here to recover, and you haven't nearly had enough time for it yet."

"I do look as if a high wind would blow me away, don't I?" he laughed.

"No matter how you look, you ought not to go. You are just making fun of it, as you always do of everything. No matter, you can have all the fun you like, but the whole thing is settled; you are not going away at all, you are going to stay here," she concluded with most decided but winning emphasis.

"Oh, I'm not going? Well, that is quite a change for me," said Thorne composedly. He laid his hat back on the table and came closer to Edith. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me what I am going to do."

"I don't mind at all, and it is this. You see I have been to see—I am almost afraid to tell you."

"Don't tell me," said the man with sudden seriousness, laying aside all his pleasantry, "because it can't be true. I have my orders, and I am leaving to-night."

"Where—to Petersburg—to the front?"

"We can't always tell where orders will take us," he said evasively, again sitting down beside her on the lounge.

He could scarcely tear himself away from her, from the delicious yet painful emotion aroused by her presence. He ought to have gone long since, yet he was with her, as he supposed, for the last time. Surely he might indulge himself a little. He loved her so desperately, so hopelessly.

"But listen," said the girl; "supposing there were other orders, orders from a higher authority, appointing you to duty here?"

"It would not make any difference."

"You don't mean you would go in spite of them?" cried the girl in sudden alarm.

Thorne looked at her gravely and nodded his head.

"But if it were proved that your first orders were a mistake——"

She stretched out her hand toward him, which Thorne clasped closely again.

"But it wasn't a mistake, and I must go," he said slowly, rising to his feet once more, but still holding her hand.

"Is it something dangerous?" asked the girl apprehensively.

"Oh, well, enough to make it interesting."

But Edith did not respond to his well simulated humour. She drew her hand away, and Thorne fancied with a leap of his heart that she did it with reluctance. She began softly:

"Don't be angry with me if I ask you again about your orders. I must know."

"But why?" asked Thorne curiously.

"No matter, tell me."

"I can't do that. I wish I could," he answered with a slight sigh.

"You needn't," said the girl triumphantly; "I do know."

The Captain started, and in spite of his control, a look of dismay and apprehension flitted across his face as the girl went on:

"They're sending you on some mission where death is almost certain. They will sacrifice your life, because they know you are fearless and will do anything. There is a chance for you to stay here, and be just as much use, and I am going to ask you to take it. It isn't your life alone—

there are—others to think of and—that's why I ask you. It may not sound well, perhaps I ought not—you won't understand, but you——"

As she spoke she rose to her feet, confronting him, while she impulsively thrust out her hand toward him again. Once more he took that beloved hand in his own, holding it close against him. Burning avowals sprang to his lips, and the colour flamed into her face as she stood motionless and expectant, looking at him. She had gone as far as a modest woman might. Now the initiative was his. She could only wait.

"No," said the man at last, by the exercise of the most iron self-control and repression, "you shall not have this against me, too."

Edith drew closer to him, leaving her hand in his as she placed her other on his shoulder. She thought she knew what he would have said. And love gave her courage. The frankness of war was in the air. If this man left her now, she might never see him again. She was a woman, but she could not let him go without an effort.

"Against you! What against you? What do you mean?" she asked softly.

The witchery of the hour was upon him, too, and the sweetness of her presence. He knew he had but to speak to receive his answer, to summon the fortress and receive the surrender. Her eyes dropped before his passionately searching look, her colour came and went, her bosom rose and fell. She thought he must certainly hear the wild beating of her heart. He pressed her hands closely to his breast for a moment, but quickly pulled himself together again.

"I must go," he said hoarsely; "my business is—elsewhere. I ought never to have seen you

or spoken to you, but I had to come to this house and you were here, and how could I help it? Oh—I couldn't for my whole—it's only you in this——" He stopped and thrust her hands away from him blindly and turned away. As there was a God above him he would not do it. "Your mother—I would like to say good-bye to her."

"No, you are not going," cried the girl desperately, playing her last card. "Listen, they need you in Richmond: the President told me so himself—your orders are to stay here. You are to be given a special commission on the War Department Telegraph Service, and you——"

"No, no, I won't take it—I can't take it, Miss Varney."

"Can't you do that much for—me?" said the girl with winning sweetness, and again she put out her hands to him.

"It is for you that I will do nothing of the kind," he answered quickly; "if you ever think of me again after—well, when I am gone, remember that I refused."

"But you can't refuse; it is the President's desire, it is his order, you have got to obey. Wait a moment, I left it upstairs. I will fetch it for you and you will see."

She turned toward the door.

"No," said Thorne, "don't get it, I won't look at it."

"But you must see what it is. It puts you at the head of everything. You have entire control. When you see it I know you will accept it. Please wait."

"No, Miss Varney, I can't——"

"Oh, yes, you can," cried Edith, who would hear no denial as she ran swiftly toward the door.

CHAPTER IV

MISS MITFORD'S INTERVENTION

THE Captain stared after her departing figure; he listened to her footfalls on the stair, and then came to an instant resolution. He would take advantage of her opportune withdrawal. He turned back to the table, seized his hat, and started for the door, only to come face to face with another charming young woman, who stood breathless before him to his great and ill-concealed annoyance. Yet the newcomer was pretty enough and young enough and sweet enough to give any man pause for the sheer pleasure of looking at her, to say nothing of speaking to her.

The resources of an ancient wardrobe, that looked as though it had belonged to her great-grandmother, had been called upon for a costume which was quaint and old-fashioned and altogether lovely. She was evidently much younger than Edith Varney, perhaps just sixteen, Wilfred's age. With outstretched arms she barred the door completely, and Thorne, of course, came to an abrupt stop.

"Oh, good-evening," she panted, as soon as she found speech; she had run without stopping from her house across the street.

"Good-evening, Miss Mitford," he answered, stepping to one side to let her pass, but through

calculation or chance she kept her position at the door.

"How lucky this is!" she continued. "You are the very person I wanted to see. Let's sit down and then I'll tell you all about it. Goodness me, I am all out of breath just running over from our house."

Thorne did not accept her invitation, but stood looking at her. An idea came to him.

"Miss Mitford," he said at last, stepping toward her, "will you do something for me?"

"Of course I will."

"Thank you very much, indeed. Just tell Miss Varney when she comes down—just say good-night for me and tell her that I've gone."

"I wouldn't do such a thing for the wide, wide world," returned Caroline Mitford in pretended astonishment.

"Why not?"

"It would be a wicked, dreadful story, because you wouldn't be gone."

"I am sorry you look at it that way," said Thorne, "because I am going. Good-night, Miss Mitford."

But before he could leave the room, the girl, who was as light on her feet as a fairy, caught him by the arm.

"No—you don't seem to understand. I've got something to say to you."

"Yes, I know," said Thorne; "but some other time."

"No, now."

Of course, he could have freed himself by the use of a little force, but such a thing was not to be thought of. Everything conspired to keep

him when his duty called him away, he thought quickly.

"There isn't any other time," said Caroline, "it is to-night. We are going to have a Starvation party."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Thorne; "another!"

"Yes, we are."

"I can't see how it concerns me."

"It is going to be over at our house, and we expect you in half an hour."

"I shouldn't think you would want to play at this time."

"We are not going to play. We are going to make bandages and sandbags and——"

"You won't need me."

"Yes, you can tell us the best way to——"

"Thank you, Miss Mitford, I can't come. I have my orders and I am leaving to-night."

"Now, that won't do at all," said the girl, pouting. "You went to Mamie Jones' party; I don't see why you should treat me like this."

"Mamie Jones!" said Thorne. "Why, that was last Thursday, and now I have got orders, I tell you, and——"

But Caroline was not to be put off.

"Now, there's no use talking about it," she said vehemently.

"Yes, I see that."

"Didn't you promise to obey orders when I gave them? Well, these are orders."

"Another set," laughed Thorne.

"I don't know anything about any others. These are mine."

"Well, but this time——"

"This time is just the same as all the other

times, only worse; besides I told her you would be there."

"What's that?"

"I say she expects you, that's all."

"Who expects me?"

"Why, Edith, of course; who do you suppose I was talking about all this time?"

"Oh, she expects me to——"

"Why, of course, she does. You are to take her over. You needn't stay if you don't want to. Now I will go and tell her you are waiting."

"Oh, very well," said Thorne, smiling; "if she expects me to take her over I will do so, of course, but I can't stay a moment."

"Well," said Caroline, "I thought you would come to your senses some time or another. Look here, Mr. Captain, was she almost ready?"

"Well, how do I know."

"What dress did she have on?"

"Dress?"

"Oh, you men! Why, she's only got two."

"Yes; well, very likely, this was one of them, Miss Mitford."

"No matter, I am going upstairs to see, anyway. Captain Thorne, you can wait out there on the veranda or, perhaps, it would be pleasanter if you were to smoke a cigar out in the summer-house at the side of the garden. It is lovely there in the moonlight, and——"

"I know, but if I wait here——"

"Those are my orders. It's cooler outside, you know, anyway, and——"

"Pardon me, Miss Mitford, orders never have to be explained, you know," interrupted the Captain, smiling at the charming girl.

"That's right; I take back the explanation,"

she said, as Thorne stepped toward the window; "and, Captain," cried the girl.

"Yes?"

"Be sure and smoke."

Thorne laughed, as he lighted his cigar and stepped out on to the porch, and thence into the darkness of the garden path.

"Oh," said Caroline to herself, "he is splendid. If Wilfred were only like that!" she pouted. "But then—our engagement's broken off anyway, so what's the difference. If he were like that—I'd—— No!—I don't think I'd——"

Her soliloquy was broken by the entrance of Mrs. Varney, who came slowly down the room.

"Why, Caroline, dear! What are you talking about, all to yourself?"

"Oh—just—I was just saying, you know—that—why, I don't know what I was—— Do you think it is going to rain?" she returned in great confusion.

"Dear me, child; I haven't thought about it. Why, what have you got on? Is that a new dress, and in Richmond?"

"A new dress? Well, I should think so. These are my great-grandmother's mother's wedding clothes. Aren't they lovely? Just in the nick of time, too. I was on my very last rags, or, rather, they were on me, and I didn't know what to do. Mother gave me a key and told me to open an old horsehair trunk in the attic, and these were in it." She seized the corners of her dress and pirouetted a step or two forward to show it off, and then dropped the older woman an elaborate, old-fashioned courtesy. "I ran over to show them to Edith,"

she resumed. "Where is she? I want her to come over to my house."

"Upstairs, I think. I am afraid she can't come. I have just come from her room," Mrs. Varney continued as Caroline started to interrupt, "and she means to stay here."

"I will see about that," said Caroline, running out of the room.

Mrs. Varney turned and sat down at her desk to write a letter, which evidently, from her sighs, was not an easy task. In a short time the girl was back again. Mrs. Varney looked up from writing and smiled at her.

"You see it was no use, Caroline," she began.

"No use," laughed the girl; "well, you will see. I didn't try to persuade her or argue with her. I just told her that Captain Thorne was waiting for her in the summer-house. Yes," she continued, as Mrs. Varney looked her astonishment; "he is still here, and he said he would take her over. You just watch which dress she has on when she comes down. Now I will go out there and tell him she'll be down in a minute. I have more trouble getting people fixed so that they can come to my party than it would take to run a blockade into Savannah every fifteen minutes."

Mrs. Varney looked at her departing figure pleasantly for a moment, and then, with a deep sigh, resumed her writing, but she evidently was not to conclude her letter without further interruption, for she had scarcely begun again when Wilfred came into the room with a bundle very loosely done up in heavy brown paper. As his mother glanced toward him he made a violent effort to conceal it under his coat.

"What have you got there, Wilfred?" she asked incuriously.

"That? Oh, nothing; it is only—say, mother, have you written that letter yet?"

"No, my dear, I have been too busy. I have been trying to write it, though, since I came down, but I have had one interruption after another. I think I will go into your father's office and do it there." She gathered up her paper and turned to leave the room. "It is a hard letter for me to write, you know," she added as she went away.

Wilfred, evidently much relieved at his mother's departure, took the package from under his coat, put it on the table, and began to undo it. He took from it a pair of very soiled, dilapidated, grey uniform trousers. He had just lifted them up when he heard Caroline's step on the porch, and the next moment she came into the room through the long French window. Wilfred stood petrified with astonishment at the sudden and unexpected appearance of his young beloved, but soon recovered himself and began rolling the package together again, hastily and awkwardly, while Caroline watched him from the window. She coldly scrutinised his confusion while he made his ungainly roll, and, as he moved toward the door, she broke the silence.

"Ah, good evening, Mr. Varney," she said coolly.

"Good evening," he said, his voice as cold as her own.

They both of them had started for the hall door and in another second they would have met.

"Excuse me," said Caroline, "I'm in a hurry."

"That's plain enough. Another party, I suppose, and dancing."

"What of it? What's the matter with dancing I'd like to know."

"Nothing is the matter with dancing if you want to, but I must say that it is a pretty way of going on, with the cannon roaring not six miles away."

"Well, what do you want us to do? Cry about it! I have cried my eyes out already; that would do a heap of good now, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, I haven't time to talk about such petty details. I have some important matters to attend to," he returned loftily.

"It was you that started it," said the girl.

Wilfred turned suddenly, his manner at once losing its badly assumed lightness.

"Oh, you needn't try to fool me," he reproached her; "I know well enough how you have been carrying on since our engagement was broken off. Half a dozen officers proposing to you—a dozen for all I know."

"What difference does it make?" she retorted pertly. "I haven't got to marry them all, have I?"

"Well, it isn't very nice to go on like that," said Wilfred with an air into which he in vain sought to infuse a detached, judicial, and indifferent appearance. "Proposals by the wholesale!"

"Goodness me!" exclaimed Caroline, "what's the use of talking about it to me. They're the ones that propose, I don't. How can I help it?"

"Oh," said Wilfred loftily, "you can help it all right. You helped it with me."

"Well," she answered, with a queer look at him, "that was different."

"And ever since you threw me over——" he began.

"I didn't throw you over, you just went over," she interrupted.

"I went over because you walked off with Major Sillsby that night we were at Drury's Bluff," said the boy, "and you encouraged him to propose. You admit it," he said, as the girl nodded her head.

"Of course I did. I didn't want him hanging around for ever, did I? That's the only way to finish them off. What do you want me to do—string a placard around my neck, saying, 'No proposals received here. Apply at the office'? Would that make you feel any better? Well," she continued, as the boy shrugged his shoulders, "if it doesn't make any difference to you what I do, it doesn't even make as much as that to me."

"Oh, it doesn't? I think it does, though. You looked as if you enjoyed it pretty well while the Third Virginia was in the city."

"I should think I did," said Caroline ecstatically. "I just love every one of them. They are going to fight for us and die for us, and I love them."

"Why don't you accept one of them before he dies, then, and have done with it? I suppose it will be one of those smart young fellows with a cavalry uniform."

"It will be some kind of a uniform, I can tell you that. It won't be any one that stays in Richmond."

"Now I see what it was," said Wilfred, looking at her gloomily. "I had to stay in Richmond, and——"

The boy choked up and would not finish.

"Well," said Caroline, "that made a heap of difference. Why, I was the only girl on Franklin Street that didn't have a—some one she was engaged to—at the front. Just think what it was to be out of it like that! You have no idea how I suffered; besides, it is our duty to help all we can. There aren't many things a girl can do, but Colonel Woolbridge—he's one of Morgan's new men, you know—said that the boys fight twice as well when they have a—sweetheart at home. I couldn't waste an engagement on——"

"And is that why you let them all propose to you?" rejoined the youth bitterly.

"Certainly; it didn't hurt me, and it pleased them. Most of 'em will never come back to try it again, and it is our duty to help all we can."

"And you really want to help all you can, do you?" asked Wilfred desperately. "Well, if I were to join the army would you help me—that way?"

This was a direct question. It was the *argumentum ad feminam* with a vengeance. Caroline hesitated. A swift blush overspread her cheek, but she was game to the core.

"Why, of course I would, if there was anything I—could do," she answered.

"Well, there is something you can do." He unrolled his package and seized the trousers by the waistband and dangled them before her eyes. "Cut those off," he said; "they are twice too long. All you have to do is to cut them here and sew up the ends, so that they don't ravel out."

Caroline stared at him in great bewilderment. She had expected something quite different.

"Why, they are uniform trousers," she said finally. "You are going to join the army?" She clapped her hands gleefully. "Give them to me."

"Hush! don't talk so loud, for Heaven's sake," said Wilfred. "I've got a jacket here, too." He drew out of the parcel a small army jacket, a private soldier's coat. "It's nearly a fit. It came from the hospital. Johnny Seldon wore it, but he won't want it any more, you know, and he was just about my size, only his legs were longer. Well," he continued, as the girl continued to look at him strangely, "I thought you said you wanted to help me."

"I certainly do."

"What are you waiting for, then?" asked Wilfred.

The girl took the trousers and dropped on her knees before him.

"Stand still," she said, as she measured the trousers from the waistband to the floor. "This is about the place, isn't it?"

"Yes, just there."

"Wait," she continued, "until I mark it with a pin."

Wilfred stood quietly until the proper length had been ascertained, and then he assisted Caroline to her feet.

"Do you see any scissors about?" she asked in a businesslike way.

"I don't believe there are any in the drawing-room, but I can get some from the women sewing over there. Wait a moment."

"No, don't," said the girl; "they would want to know what you wanted with them, and then you would have to tell them."

"Yes," said the boy; "and I want to keep this a secret between us."

"When are you going to wear them?"

"As soon as you get them ready."

"But your mother——"

"She knows it. She is going to write to father to-night. She said she would send it by a special messenger, so we ought to get an answer by to-morrow."

"But if he says no?"

"I am going anyway."

"Oh, Wilfred, I am so glad. Why, it makes another thing of it," cried the girl. "When I said that about staying in Richmond, I didn't know—— Oh, I do want to help all I can."

"You do? Well, then, for Heaven's sake, be quick about it and cut off those trousers. So long as I get them in the morning," said Wilfred, "I guess it will be in plenty of time."

"When did you say your mother was going to write?"

"To-night."

"Of course, she doesn't want you to go, and she'll tell your father not to let you. Yes," she continued sagely, as Wilfred looked up, horror-stricken at the idea; "that's the way mothers always do."

"What can I do, then?" he asked her.

"Why don't you write to him yourself, and then you can tell him just what you like."

"That's a fine idea. I'll tell him that I can't stay here, and that I'm going to enlist whether he says so or not. That'll make him say yes, won't it?"

"Why, of course; there'll be nothing else for him to say."

"Say, you are a pretty good girl," said Wilfred, catching her hand impulsively. "I'll go upstairs and write it now. You finish these as soon as you can. You can ask those women for some scissors, and when they are ready leave them in this cupboard, but don't let any one see you doing it, whatever happens."

"No, I won't," said Caroline, as Wilfred hurried off.

She went over to the room where the women were sewing, and borrowed a pair of scissors; then she came back and started to cut off the trousers where they were marked. The cloth was old and worn, but it was, nevertheless, stiff and hard, and her scissors were dull. Men spent their time in sharpening other things than women's tools during those days in Richmond, and her slender fingers made hard work of the amputations. Beside, she was prone to stop and think and dream of her soldier boy while engaged in this congenial work. She had not finished the alteration, therefore, when she heard a step in the hall. She caught up the trousers, striving to conceal them, entirely forgetful of the jacket which lay on the table.

"Oh," said Mrs. Varney, as she came into the room; "you haven't gone yet?"

"No," faltered the girl; "we don't assemble for a little while, and——"

"Don't assemble?"

"I mean for the party. It doesn't begin for half an hour yet, and——"

"Oh; then you have plenty of time."

"Yes," said Caroline. "But I will have to go now, sure enough." She turned away and, as she did so, her scissors fell clattering to the floor.

"You dropped your scissors, my dear," said Mrs. Varney.

"I thought I heard something fall," she faltered in growing confusion.

She came back for her scissors, and, in her agitation and nervousness, she dropped one of the pieces of trouser leg on the floor.

"What are you making, Caroline?" asked Mrs. Varney, looking curiously at the little huddled-up soiled piece of grey on the carpet, while Caroline made a desperate grab at it.

"Oh, just altering an old—dress, Mrs. Varney. That's all."

Mrs. Varney looked at her through her glasses. As she did so, Caroline's agitated movement caused the other trouser leg, with its half-severed end hanging from it, to dangle over her arm.

"And what is that?" asked Mrs. Varney.

"Oh—that's—er—one of the sleeves," answered Caroline desperately, hurrying out in great confusion.

Mrs. Varney laughed softly to herself. As she did so, her glance fell upon the little heap of grey on the table. She picked it up and opened it. It was a grey jacket, a soldier's jacket. It looked as if it might be about Wilfred's size. There was a bullet hole in the breast, and there was a dull brown stain around the opening. Mrs. Varney kissed the worn coat. She saw it all now.

"For Wilfred," she whispered. "He has probably got it from some dead soldier at the hospital, and Caroline's dress that she was altering——"

She clasped the jacket tightly to her breast, looked up, and smiled and prayed through her tears.

CHAPTER V

THE UNFAITHFUL SERVANT

But Mrs. Varney was not allowed to indulge in either her bitter retrospect or her dread anticipations very long. Her reverie was interrupted by the subdued trampling of heavy feet upon the floor of the back porch. The long drawing-room extended across the house, and had porches at front and back, to which access was had through long French windows. The sound was so sudden and so unexpected that she dropped the jacket on the couch and turned to the window. The sound of low, hushed voices came to her, and the next moment a tall, fine-looking young man of rather distinguished appearance entered the room. He was not in uniform, but wore the customary full-skirted frock coat of the period, and carried his big black hat in his hand. For the rest, he was a very keen, sharp-eyed man, whose movements were quick and stealthy, and whose quick, comprehensive glance seemed to take in not only Mrs. Varney, but everything in the room. Through the windows and the far door soldiers could be seen dimly. Mrs. Varney was very indignant at the entrance of this newcomer in this unceremonious manner.

"Mr. Arrelsford!" she exclaimed haughtily.

In two or three quick steps Mr. Benton Arrelsford of the Confederate Secret Service was by her

side. Although she was alone, through habit and excessive caution he lowered his voice when he spoke to her.

"Your pardon, Mrs. Varney," he said, with just a shade too much of the peremptory for perfect breeding. "I was compelled to enter without ceremony. You will understand when I tell you why."

"And those men——" said Mrs. Varney, pointing to the back windows and the far door. "What have we done that we should be——"

"They are on guard."

"On guard!" exclaimed the woman, greatly surprised and equally resentful.

"Yes, ma'am; and I am very much afraid we shall be compelled to put you to a little inconvenience; temporary, I assure you, but necessary." He glanced about cautiously and pointed to the door across the hall. "Is there anybody in that room, Mrs. Varney?"

"Yes, a number of ladies sewing for the hospital; they expect to stay all night."

"Very good," said Arrelsford. "Will you kindly come a little farther away? I would not have them overhear by any possibility."

There was no possibility of any one overhearing their conversation, but if Mr. Arrelsford ever erred it was not through lack of caution. Still more astonished, Mrs. Varney followed him. They stopped by the fireplace.

"One of your servants has got himself into trouble, Mrs. Varney, and we're compelled to have him watched," he began.

"Watched by a squad of soldiers?"

"It is well not to neglect any precaution, ma'am."

"And what kind of trouble, pray?" asked the woman.

"Very serious, I am sorry to say. At least that is the way it looks now. You've got an old white-haired butler here——"

"You mean Jonas?"

"I believe that's his name," said Arrelsford.

"And you suspect him of something?"

Mr. Arrelsford lowered his voice still further and assumed an air of great importance.

"We don't merely suspect him; we know what he has done."

"And what has he done, sir?"

"He has been down to Libby Prison under pretence of selling things to the Yankees we've got in there, and he now has on his person a written communication from one of them which he intends to deliver to some Yankee spy or agent, here in Richmond."

Mrs. Varney gasped in astonishment at this tremendous charge, which was made in Arrelsford's most impressive manner.

"I don't believe it," she said at last. "He has been in the family for years; he wouldn't dare."

Arrelsford shook his head.

"I am afraid it is true," he said.

"Very well," said Mrs. Varney decidedly, apparently not at all convinced. "I will send for the man. Let us see——"

She reached out her hand to the bell-rope hanging from the wall, but Mr. Arrelsford caught her arm, evidently to her great repugnance.

"No, no!" he said quickly, "not yet. We have got to get that paper, and if he's alarmed he will destroy it, and we must have it. It will

give us the clue to one of their cursed plots. They have been right close on this town for months, trying to break down our defences and get in on us. This is some rascally game they are at to weaken us from the inside. Two weeks ago we got word from our secret agents that we keep over there in the Yankee lines, telling us that two brothers, Lewis and Henry Dumont——"

"The Dumonts of West Virginia?" interrupted Mrs. Varney, who was now keenly attentive to all that was said.

"The very same."

"Why, their father is a General in the Yankee Army."

"Yes; and they are in the Federal Secret Service, and they are the boldest, most desperately determined men in the whole Yankee Army. They've already done us more harm than an army corps."

"Yes?"

"They have volunteered to do some desperate piece of work here in Richmond, we have learned. We have close descriptions of both these men, but we have never been able to get our hands on either of them until last night."

"Have you captured them?"

"We've got one of them, and it won't take long to get the other," said Arrelsford, in a fierce, truculent whisper.

"The one you caught, was he here in Richmond?" asked Mrs. Varney, greatly affected by the other's overwhelming emotion.

"No, he was brought in last night with a lot of men we captured in a little sortie."

"Taken prisoner?"

"Yes, but without resistance."

"I don't understand."

"He let himself be taken. That's one of their tricks for getting into our lines when they want to bring a message or give some signal."

"You mean that they deliberately allow themselves to be taken to Libby Prison?"

"Yes, damn them!" said Arrelsford harshly.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, but——"

Mrs. Varney waved her hand as if Mr. Arrelsford's oaths, like his presence, were nothing to her.

"We were on the lookout for this man, and we spotted him pretty quickly. I gave orders not to search him, and not to have his clothes taken away from him, but to put him in with the others and keep the closest watch on him that was ever kept on a man. We knew from his coming in that his brother must be here in the city, and he'd send a message to him the first chance he got."

"But Jonas, how could he——"

"Easily enough. He comes down to the prison to sell things to the prisoners with other negroes. We let him pass in, watching him as we watch them all. He fools around a while, until he gets a chance to brush against this man Dumont. My men are keeping that fellow under close observation, and they saw a piece of paper pass between them. By my orders they gave no sign. We want to catch the man to whom he is to deliver the paper. He has the paper on him now."

"I will never believe it."

"It is true, and that is the reason for these men on the back porch that you see. I have put others at every window at the back of the house. He can't get away; he will have to give it up."

"And the man he gives it to will be the man you want?" said Mrs. Varney.

"Yes; but I can't wait long. If that nigger sees my men or hears a sound, he will destroy it before we can jump in on him. I want the man, but I want the paper, too. Excuse me." He stepped to the back window. "Corporal!" he said softly. The long porch window was open on account of the balmy air of the night, and a soldier, tattered and dusty, instantly appeared and saluted. "How are things now?" asked Arrelsford.

"All quiet now, sir."

"Very good," said Arrelsford. "I was afraid he would get away. We've got to get the paper. If we have the paper, perhaps we can get the man. It is the key to the game they are trying to play against us, and without it the man is helpless."

"No, no," urged Mrs. Varney. "The man he is going to give it to, get him."

"Yes, yes, of course," assented Arrelsford; "but that paper might give us a clue. If not, I'll make the nigger tell. Damn him, I'll shoot it out of him. How quickly can you get at him from that door, Corporal?"

"In no time at all, sir. It's through a hallway and across the dining-room. He is in the pantry."

"Well," said Arrelsford, "take two men, and——"

"Wait," said Mrs. Varney; "I still doubt your story, but I am glad to help. Why don't you keep your men out of sight and let me send for him here, and then——"

Arrelsford thought a moment.

"That may be the better plan," he admitted.

"Get him in here and, while you are talking to him, they can seize him from behind. He won't be able to do a thing. Do you hear, Corporal?"

"Yes, sir."

"Keep your men out of sight; get them back there in the hall, and while we're making him talk, send a man down each side and pin him. Hold him stiff. He mustn't destroy any paper he's got."

The Corporal raised his hand in salute and left the room. The men disappeared from the windows, and the back porch looked as empty as before. The whole discussion and the movements of the men had been practically noiseless.

"Now, Mr. Arrelsford, are you ready?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Mrs. Varney rang the bell on the instant. The two watched each other intently, and in a moment old Martha appeared at the door.

"Did you ring, ma'am?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Varney; "I want some one to send to the hospital."

"Luthah is out heah, ma'am."

"Luther? He's too small, I don't want a boy."

"Well, den, Jonas——"

"Yes, Jonas will do; tell him to come in here immediately."

"Yas'm."

"Perhaps you had better sit down, Mrs. Varney," said Arrelsford; "and if you will permit me, I will stand back by the front window yonder."

"That will be just as well," said Mrs. Varney, seating herself near the table, while Arrelsford, making no effort at concealment, stepped over to the window. Old Jonas entered the door just

as they had placed themselves. He bowed low before Mrs. Varney, entirely unsuspicious of anything out of the ordinary until his eye fell on the tall form of Arrelsford. He glanced furtively at the man for a moment, stiffened imperceptibly, but, as there was nothing else to do, came on.

"Jonas," said Mrs. Varney, her voice low and level in spite of her agitation.

"Yes'm."

"Have you any idea why I sent for you?"

"Ah heahd you was gwine send me to de hossiple, ma'am."

"Oh, then Martha told you," said Mrs. Varney.

While the little dialogue was taking place, Mr. Arrelsford had made a signal, and the Corporal and two men had entered the room silently, and now swiftly advanced to the side of the still unobserving old negro.

"She didn't ezzactly say whut you——" he began.

The next instant the two men fell upon him. He might have made some struggle, although it would have been useless. The windows were instantly filled with men, and an order would have called them into the room. He was an old man, and the two soldiers that seized him were young. He was too surprised to fight, and stood as helpless as a lamb about to be slaughtered, his face fairly grey with sudden terror. The Corporal flung open the butler's faded livery coat, and for the moment Jonas, menaced now by a search, and knowing what the result would be, struggled furiously, but the men soon mastered him, and the Corporal, continuing his search, presently drew from an inside pocket a small folded paper.

"Jonas! Jonas!" said Mrs. Varney, in bitter disappointment; "how could you?"

"I told you so," said Mr. Arrelsford truthfully, triumphantly, and most aggravatingly under the circumstances, taking the folded paper. "Corporal," he added, "while I read this, see if he has got anything more."

A further search, however, revealed nothing. Arrelsford had scarcely completed the reading of the brief note when the Corporal reported:

"That is all he has, sir."

Arrelsford nodded. The men had released Jonas, but stood by his side, and the Secret Service Agent now approached him.

"Who was this for?" he asked sharply and tensely.

The negro stared at him stolidly and silently, his face ashen with fright.

"Look here," continued the other, "if you don't tell me it is going to make it pretty bad for you."

The words apparently made no further impression upon the servant. Arrelsford tried another tack. He turned to Mrs. Varney, who was completely dismayed at this breach of trust by one who had been attached to the family fortunes for so many years.

"I am very sorry, ma'am," he said very distinctly, "but it looks as if we have got to shoot him."

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Varney at that. "Jonas, speak!"

But even to that appeal he remained silent. Arrelsford waited a moment and then:

"Corporal," he said; "take him outside and get it out of him. String him up until he talks.

But don't let him yell or give any alarm; gag him until he's ready to tell. You understand?"

The Corporal nodded and turned toward the hall door.

"Not that way," said Arrelsford; "take him to the back of the house and keep him quiet, whatever you do. Nobody must know about this, not a soul."

"Very good, sir," said the Corporal, saluting. He gave an order to the men, and they marched Jonas off, swiftly and silently. Nothing that had been said or done had disturbed the women across the hall. Mrs. Varney glanced up at the unfolded piece of paper in Mr. Arrelsford's hand. He was smiling triumphantly.

"Was there anything in that?" she asked.

"Yes, there was. We know the trick they meant to play."

"But not the man who was to play it?"

"I didn't say that, ma'am."

"Does it give you a clue to it?"

"It does."

"Will it answer?"

"It will."

"Then you know——"

"As plain as if we had his name."

"Thank God for that," exclaimed the woman. "May I see it?"

Arrelsford hesitated.

"I see no reason why you should not."

He extended his hand toward her, and she glanced at the paper.

"*Attack to-night. Plan* 3. *Use telegraph!*" she read. She looked up.

"What does it mean?" she asked tremulously.

"They are to attack to-night, and the place

where they are to strike is indicated by Plan 3."

"Plan 3?" questioned the woman.

"Yes; the man this is sent to will know what is meant by that. It has been arranged beforehand, and——"

"But the last words," said Mrs. Varney. "Use telegraph?"

"That is plain, too. He is to use our War Department Telegraph and send some false order to weaken that position, the one they indicated by 'Plan 3,' so that when they assault it, they will find it feebly defended or not at all, and break through and come down on the city and swamp us."

"But," exclaimed Mrs. Varney in deepest indignation and excitement, "the man who was to do this? Who is he? There is nothing about him that I can see."

"But I can see something."

"What? Where?"

"In the words, 'Use Telegraph.' We know every man on the telegraph service, and every one of them is true. There is some one who will try to get into that service if the game is carried out, and——"

"Then he will be the man," said Mrs. Varney.

"Yes; there aren't so many men in Richmond that can do that. It isn't every man that's expert enough—— Mrs. Varney, Jonas brought this paper to your house, and——"

"To my house?" exclaimed the woman in great astonishment, and then she stopped, appalled by a sudden thought which came to her.

"At the same time," said Arrelsford, "your daughter has been trying to get an appointment

for some one on the telegraph service. Perhaps she could give us some idea, and——"

Mrs. Varney rose and stood as if rooted to the spot.

"You mean——"

"Captain Thorne," said Arrelsford impressively.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONFIDENCE OF EDITH VARNEY

Mrs. Varney had, of course, divined toward whom Arrelsford's suspicion pointed. She had been entirely certain before he had mentioned the name that the alleged spy or traitor could be none other than her daughter's friend; indeed, it would not be stretching the truth to say that Thorne was her friend as well as her daughter's, and her keen mother's wit was not without suspicion that if he were left to himself, or if he were permitted to follow his own inclinations, the relation between himself and the two women might have been a nearer one still and a dearer one, yet, nevertheless, the shocking announcement came to her with sudden, sharp surprise.

We may be perfectly certain, absolutely sure, of a coming event, but when it does occur its shock is felt in spite of previous assurance. We may watch the dying and pray for death to end anguish, and know that it is coming, but when the last low breath has gone, it is as much of a shock to us as if it had not been expected, or even dreamed of.

The announcement of the name was shattering to her composure. She knew very well why Arrelsford would rejoice to find Thorne guilty

of anything, and she would have discounted any ordinary accusation that he brought against him, but the train of the circumstances was so complete in this case and the coincidences so unexplainable upon any other theory, the evidence so convincing, that she was forced to admit that Arrelsford was fully justified in his suspicion, and that without regard to the fact that he was a rejected suitor of her daughter's.

Surprise, horror, and conviction lodged in her soul, and were mirrored in her face. Arrelsford saw and divined what was passing in her mind, and, eager to strike while the iron was hot, bent forward open-mouthed to continue his line of reasoning and denunciation, but Mrs. Varney checked him. She laid her finger upon her lips and pointed with the other hand to the front of the house.

"What!" exclaimed the Confederate Secret Service agent; "is he there?"

Mrs. Varney nodded.

"He may be. He went out to the summer-house some time ago to wait for Edith; they were going over to Caroline Mitford's later on. I saw him go down the walk."

"Do you suppose my men could have alarmed him?" asked Arrelsford, greatly perturbed at this unexpected development.

"I don't know. They were all at the back windows. They didn't seem to make much noise. I suppose not. You have a description of the man for whom the letter was intended?"

"Yes, at the office; but I remember it perfectly."

"Does it fit this—this Captain Thorne?"

"You might as well know sooner as later,

Mrs. Varney, that there is no Captain Thorne. This is an assumed name, and the man you have in your house is Lewis Dumont."

"Do you mean that he came here to——"

"He came to this town, to this house," said Arrelsford vindictively, his voice still subdued but full of fury, "knowing your position, the influence of your name, your husband's rank and service, for the sole purpose of getting recognised as a reputable person, so that he would be less likely to be suspected. He has corrupted your servants—you saw old Jonas—and he has contrived to enlist the powerful support of your daughter. His aim is the War Department Telegraph Office. He is friends with the men at that office. What else he hasn't done or what he has, the Lord only knows. But Washington is not the only place where they have a secret service; we have one at Richmond. Whatever game he plays, it is one that two can play; and now it is my play."

The patter of light footsteps was heard on the stairs, a flash of white seen through the open door into the hall dimly lighted, and Edith Varney came rapidly, almost breathlessly, into the room. She had changed her dress, and if Caroline Mitford had been there, she would have known certainly from the little air of festivity about her clean but faded and darned, sprigged and flowered white muslin frock that she was going to accept the invitation. In one hand she held her hat, which she swung carelessly by its long faded ribbons, and in the other that official envelope which had come to her from the President of the Confederacy. She called to her mother as she ran down.

"Mamma!" Her face was white and her voice pitched high, fraught with excited intensity. "Under my window, in the rosebushes, at the back of the house! They're hurting somebody frightfully, I am sure!"

She burst into the room with the last word. Mrs. Varney stared at her, understanding fully who, in all probability, was being roughly dealt with in the rosebushes, and realising what a terrible effect such disclosures as she had listened to would produce upon the mind of the girl.

"Come," said Edith, turning rapidly toward the rear window; "we must stop it."

Mrs. Varney stood as if rooted to the floor.

"Well," said the girl, in great surprise, "if you aren't coming, I will go myself."

These words awakened her mother to action.

"Wait, Edith," she said.

Now, and for the first time, Edith noticed Mr. Arrelsford, who had stepped back and away from her mother. She replied to his salutation with a cold and distant bow. The man's face flushed; he turned away.

"But, mamma, the men outside," persisted the girl.

"Wait, my dear," said her mother, taking her gently by the arm; "I must tell you something. It will be a great shock to you, I am afraid."

"What is it, mamma? Has father or——"

"No, no, not that," said Mrs. Varney. "A man we have trusted as a friend has shown himself a conspirator, a spy, a traitor."

"Who is it!" cried the girl, at the same time instinctively divining—how or why she could not

tell, and that thought smote her afterward—to whom the reference was being made.

Mrs. Varney naturally hesitated to say the name. Arrelsford, carried away by his passion for the girl and his hatred for Thorne, was not so reticent. He stepped toward her.

"It is the gentleman, Miss Varney, whose attentions you have been pleased to accept in the place of mine," he burst out bitterly.

His manner and his meaning were unmistakable. The girl stared at him with a white, haughty face, in spite of her trembling lips. Mechanically she thrust the envelope with the commission into her belt, and confronted the man who loved her and whom she did not love, who accused of this hateful thing the man whom, in the twinkling of an eye, she realised she did love. Then the daughter turned to her mother.

"Is it Mr. Arrelsford who makes this accusation?" she asked.

"Yes," said Arrelsford, again answering for Mrs. Varney, "since you wish to know. From the first I have had my suspicions about this——"

But Edith did not wait for him to finish his sentence. She turned away from him with loathing, and moved rapidly toward the front window.

"Where are you going?" asked Arrelsford.

"For Captain Thorne."

"Not now," he said peremptorily.

The colour flamed in the girl's cheek again.

"Mr. Arrelsford, you have said something to me about Captain Thorne. Are you afraid to say it to him?"

"Miss Varney," answered Arrelsford hotly, "if you—if you——"

"Edith," said Mrs. Varney, "Mr. Arrelsford

has good reasons for not meeting Captain Thorne now."

"I should think he had," returned the girl swiftly; "for a man who made such a charge to his face would not live to make it again."

"My dear, my dear," said her mother, gently but firmly, "you don't understand, you don't——"

"Mamma," said the girl, "this man has left his desk in the War Department so that he can have the pleasure of persecuting me."

Both the mother and the rejected suitor noticed her identification of herself with Captain Thorne in the pronoun "me," one with sinking heart and the other with suppressed fury.

"He has never attempted anything active in the service before," continued Edith, "and when I ask him to face the man he accuses, he turns like a coward!"

"Mrs. Varney, if she thinks——"

"I think nothing," said the girl furiously; "I know that Captain Thorne's character is above suspicion."

Arrelsford sneered.

"His character! Where did he come from—what is he?"

"For that matter," said Edith intensely, "where did you come from, and what are you?"

"That is not the question," was the abrupt reply.

"Neither," said the girl, "is it the question who he is. If it were, I'd answer it—I'd tell you that he is a soldier who has fought and been wounded in service, while you——"

Arrelsford made a violent effort to control

himself under this bitter jibing and goading, and to his credit, succeeded in part.

"We are not so sure of that, Miss Varney," he said more coolly.

"But I am sure," answered the girl. "Why, he brought us letters from Stonewall Jackson himself."

"Has it occurred to you that General Jackson was dead before his letters were presented?" asked Arrelsford quickly.

"What does that signify if he wrote them before he was killed?"

"Nothing certainly," assented the other, "if he wrote them."

"The signatures and the letters were verified."

"They may have been written for some one else and this Thorne may have possessed himself of them by fraud, or——"

"Mr. Arrelsford," cried the girl, more and more angry, "if you mean——"

"My dear child," said Mrs. Varney, "you don't understand. They have proofs of a conspiracy. The Yankees are going to try to break through our lines to-night, some one is going to use the telegraph, and two men in the Northern Secret Service have been sent here to do this work. One is in Libby Prison. Our faithful Jonas has been corrupted. He went there to-day and took a message from one and brought it here to deliver it to the other. They are trying to make him speak out there to tell who—— Our country, our cause, is at stake."

"Is this Mr. Arrelsford's story?" asked the daughter stubbornly, apparently entirely unconvinced.

"No; these are facts. We had Jonas in

here," answered her mother; "caught him off his guard, and found the incriminating paper on him."

"But he has not said it was for——" persisted Edith desperately.

"Not yet," whispered Mr. Arrelsford, "but he will. You may be sure of that; we have means to—Oh, Corporal," he broke off eagerly, looking toward the door where the Corporal stood, his hand at salute. "Well, speak out, what does he say?"

"Nothing, sir."

"What have you done with him?"

"Strung him up three times, and——"

"Well, string him up again," snarled Arrelsford. "If he won't speak, shoot it out of him, kill the dog. We don't need his evidence any way, there's enough without it."

"There is nothing," said Edith tersely.

"By midnight," answered Arrelsford, "you shall have all the proof——"

"There is no proof to have," persisted the girl.

"I will show it to you at the telegraph office, if you dare to go with me."

"Dare! I will go anywhere, even with you, for that——"

"I will call for you in half an hour then," said Arrelsford, going toward the door.

"Wait," interrupted Edith; "what are you going to do?"

"I am going to let him get this paper," said Arrelsford, coming back to the table. "He will know what they want him to do, and then we'll see him try to do it."

"You are going to spy on him, are you?"

"I am going to prove what he is."

"Then prove it openly at once. It is shameful to let such a suspicion rest upon an honourable man. Let him come in here, and——"

"It is impossible."

"Then do something, something, but do it now!" cried the girl. "You will soon know that he is innocent, you must know it. Wait! You say the prisoner in Libby is his brother—that's what you said—his brother. Bring him here. Go to the prison and bring that man here."

"What?"

"Let them meet. Bring them face to face, then you can see whether——"

"You mean bring them together here?"

"Yes."

"As if the prisoner were trying to escape?"

"Exactly."

"There is something in that," said Arrelsford; "when do you suggest——"

"Now."

"I am willing to try it, but it depends upon you. Can you keep Thorne here?"

"I can."

"It won't take more than half an hour. Be out there on the veranda. When I tap on the glass bring him into this room and leave him alone. And I can rely upon you to give him no hint or sign that we suspect——"

"Mr. Arrelsford!" said the girl, indignant and haughty, and her mother stepped swiftly toward her, looking at him contemptuously, as if he should have known that such an action would be impossible for either of them.

Arrelsford gazed at them a minute or two, smiled triumphantly, and passed out of the room.

"Mamma, mamma!" moaned the girl, her eyes shut, her hand extended. "Mamma," she repeated in anguish.

"I am here, Edith dear; I am here," said Mrs. Varney, coming toward her and taking her tenderly in her arms.

"Do you think—do you think—that he—he could be what they say?" Her hand fell upon the commission in her belt. "This commission I got for him this afternoon——"

"Yes?"

"The commission, you know, from the President, for the Telegraph Service—why, he refused to take it," her voice rose and rang triumphantly through the room; "he refused to take it! That doesn't look as if he wanted to use the telegraph to betray us."

"Refused! That's impossible!" said her mother.

"He said that it was for me that he couldn't take it."

"For you! Then it is true," answered Mrs. Varney.

"No, no," said the girl; "don't say it."

"Yes," said her mother; "the infamous——" The girl tried to stifle with her hand upon her mother's lips the words, but Mrs. Varney shook off her hand. "The spy, the traitor," she added witheringly.

"No, no!" cried the girl, but as she spoke, conviction seemed to come to her. Why was it that her faith was not more substantially based and enduring? she asked herself. "Mamma," she wailed, "it can't be." She buried her face in her hands for a moment and then tore them away and confronted her mother boldly. "Won't

you leave me alone for a little while, mamma?" she asked plaintively. "I must get——"

"I will go to Howard; I will be back in a short time, my dear," said her mother, gently laying her hand on her daughter's bent head.

Left alone, the girl took the commission from her belt, opened it, smoothed it out, and read it through, as if bewildered and uncomprehending. She folded it up again, and walked slowly over to one of the front windows, drew aside the curtains, and pushed it open. All was still. She listened for she knew not what. There was a footstep from the far end of the walk leading from the summerhouse, a footstep she knew. Edith moved rapidly away from the window to the table and stood by it, her hand resting upon it, her knees fairly trembling in her emotion, as she waited. The next moment the open space framed the figure of Captain Thorne. He entered fearlessly, but when his eye fell upon her there was something so strained about her attitude that a spark of suspicion was kindled in his soul. Yet his action was prompt enough. He came instantly toward her and took her hand.

"Miss Varney," he said.

Edith watched his approach fascinated, as a bird by a serpent. His touch awakened her to action. She snatched her hand away and shrank back.

"No; don't touch me!" she cried.

He looked at her in amazement. The spark of suspicion burst into flame, but she recovered herself instantly.

"Oh, it was you," she faltered. She forced a smile to her lips. "How perfectly absurd I am. I am sure I ought to be ashamed of myself.

Come, let's go out on the veranda. I want to talk to you about so many things. There's—there's half an hour—yet before we must go to Caroline's."

She had possessed herself of his hand again as she spoke. She now stepped swiftly toward the window. He followed her reluctantly until they reached the opening. She stepped through it and archly looked back at him, still in the room.

"How lovely is the night," she said with tender persuasiveness. "Come with me."

The man looked around him hastily. Every moment was precious to him. Did Miss Varney know? If so, what did she know? What was to be gained or lost by half an hour's delay on his part? He drew out his watch and glanced at it swiftly. There was time. He would never see her again. He might say he would possibly never see any one again after the hazards of this night. He was entitled to one brief moment of happiness. How long had she said? Half an hour. He would take it.

"Aren't you coming, Captain Thorne?" cried the girl from the porch, all the coquettish witchery of youth and the South in her voice.

"I am coming," answered the officer, deliberately stepping through the window, "for just half an hour," he added.

"That will be time enough," replied the girl, laughing.

BOOK II

WHAT HAPPENED AT NINE O'CLOCK

CHAPTER VII

WILFRED WRITES A LETTER

Half an hour is a short or a long time, depending upon the individual mood or the exigencies of the moment. It was a short half hour to Captain Thorne—to continue to give him the name by which he was commonly known—out in the moonlight and the rose garden with Edith Varney. It was short to him because he loved her and because he realised that in that brief space must be packed experience enough to last him into the long future, it might be into the eternal future!

It was short to Edith Varney, in part at least for the same reason, but it was shorter to him than to her, for at the end of that period the guilt or innocence of the man she loved and who loved her would be established beyond peradventure; either he was the brave, devoted, self-sacrificing Confederate soldier she thought him, or he was a spy; and since he came of a Virginia family, although West Virginia had separated from the Old Dominion, she coupled the word spy with that of traitor. Either or both would be enough to condemn him. Fighting against suspicion, she would fain have postponed the moment of revelation, of decision, therefore too quickly passed the flying moments.

It was a short half hour to Thorne, because he

might see her no more. It was a short half hour again to Edith because she might see him no more, and it might be possible that she could not even allow herself to dream upon him in his absence in the future. The recollection of the woman would ever be sweet and sacred to the man, but it might be necessary for the woman to blot out utterly the remembrance of the man.

It was a short half hour to young Wilfred in his own room, waiting impatiently for old Martha to bring him the altered uniform, over which Caroline was busily working in the large old-fashioned kitchen. She had chosen that odd haven of refuge because there she was the least likely to be interrupted and could pursue her task without fear of observation by any other eyes than those of old Martha. The household had been reduced to its smallest limit, and the younger maids who were still retained in the establishment had been summarily dismissed to their quarters for the night by the old mammy.

Now that Wilfred had taken the plunge, his impatience to go was at fever heat. He could not wait, he felt, for another moment. He had spent some of his half hour in composing a letter with great care. It was a short letter and therefore was soon finished, and he was now pacing up and down his room with uneasy steps waiting for old Martha's welcome voice.

It was a long half hour for little Caroline Mitford, busily sewing away in the kitchen. It seemed to her that she was taking for ever to turn up the bottoms of the trouser legs and make a "hem" on each, as she expressed it. She was not very skilful at such rough needlework and

her eyes were not so very clear as she played at tailoring. This is no reflection upon their natural clarity and brightness, but they were quite often dimmed with tears, which once or twice brimmed over and dropped upon the coarse fabric of the garment upon which she worked. She had known the man who had worn them last, he had been a friend of hers, and she knew the boy who was going to wear them next. If she could translate the emotions of her girlish heart, the new wearer was more than a friend. Was the same fate awaiting the latter that the former had met?

The half hour was very long to Jonas, the old butler, trembling with fright, suffering from his rough usage and terror-stricken with anticipation of the further punishment that awaited him.

The half hour was longest of all to Mrs. Varney. After her visit to Howard, who had enjoyed one of his lucid moments and who seemed to be a little better, she had come down to the drawing-room, at Mr. Arrelsford's suggestion, to see that no one from the house who might have observed, or divined, or learned, in any way what was going on within should go out into the garden and disturb the young couple, or give an alarm to the man who was the object of so much interest and suspicion, so much love and hatred.

About the only people who took no note of the time were the busy sempstresses in the room across the hall, and the first sign of life came from that room. Miss Kittridge, who appeared to have been constituted the messenger of the workers, came out of the room, went down the hall to the back of the house, and presently entered the drawing-room by the far door.

"Well," she began, seeing Mrs. Varney, "we have just sent off another batch of bandages."

"Did the same man come for them?" asked the mistress of the house.

"No, they sent another one."

"Did you have much?"

"Yes, quite a lot. We have all been at the bandages, they say that that is what they need most. So long as we have any linen left we will work at it." She turned to go away, but something in the elder woman's face and manner awakened a slight suspicion in her mind. She stopped, turned, and came back. "You look troubled, Mrs. Varney," she began. "Do you want anything?"

"No, nothing, thank you."

"Is there anything I can do or anything any of us can do?"

"Not a thing, my dear," answered Mrs. Varney, trying to smile and failing dismally.

"Is it Howard?" persisted the other, anxious to be of service.

"He seems to be a little better," returned the woman.

"I am glad to hear it, and if there is anything any of us could do for you, you would certainly tell me."

The elder woman nodded and Miss Kittridge turned decisively away and stepped briskly toward the door. On second thought, there was something she could do, reflected Mrs. Varney, and so she rose, stepped to the door in turn, and called her back.

"Perhaps it would be just as well," she said, "if any of the ladies want to go to let them out the other way. You can open the door into the

back hall. We're expecting some one here on important business, you know, and we——"

"I understand," said Miss Kittridge.

"And you will see to this?"

"Certainly; trust me."

"Thank you."

Mrs. Varney turned with a little sigh of relief and went back to her place by the table, where her work basket sat near to hand. No woman in Richmond was without a work basket with work in it for any length of time during those days. The needle was second only to the bayonet in the support of the dying Confederacy! She glanced at it, but, sure evidence of the tremendous strain under which she laboured, she made no motion to take it up. Instead, after a moment of reflection, she crossed to the wall and pulled the bell rope. In a short time, considering her bulk and unwieldiness, old Martha appeared at the far door.

"Did you ring, ma'am?" she asked.

"Yes," was the answer. "Has Miss Caroline gone yet?"

"No, ma'am," answered Martha, smilingly displaying a glorious set of white teeth. "She's been out in de kitchen fo' a w'ile."

"In the kitchen?"

"Yas'm. Ah took her out dere. She didn't want to be seen by no one."

"And what is she doing there?"

"She's been mostly sewin' an' behabin' mighty strange about sumfin a gret deal ob de time. She's a-snifflin' an' a-weepin', but Ah belieb she's gittin' ready to gwine home now."

"Very well," said Mrs. Varney, "will you please ask her to come in here a moment before she goes."

"Yas'm, 'deed Ah will," said old Martha, turning and going out of the door through which, presently, Caroline herself appeared.

She looked very demure and the air of innocence, partly natural but largely assumed, well became her although it did not deceive Mrs. Varney for a moment, or would not have deceived her if she had had any special interest in Caroline's actions or emotions. The greater strain under which she laboured made the girl of small moment; she would simply use her, that was all.

"Caroline, dear," she began immediately, "are you in a great hurry to go home?"

"No, ma'am, not particularly, especially if I can do anything for you here," answered the girl readily, somewhat surprised.

"It happens that you can," said Mrs. Varney; "if you can stay here a few minutes while I go upstairs to Howard it will be a great help to me."

"You want me just to wait here, is that it?" asked the girl, somewhat mystified.

Why on earth anybody should be required to wait in a vacant room was something which Caroline could not understand, but Mrs. Varney's next words sought to explain it.

"I don't want you merely to wait here but—well, in fact, I don't want anybody to go out on the veranda, or into the garden, from the front of the house, under any circumstances."

Caroline's eyes opened in great amazement. She did not in the least understand what it was all about until Mrs. Varney explained further.

"You see Edith's there with——"

"Oh, yes," laughed the girl, at last, as she thought, comprehending, "you want them to be left alone. I know how that is, whenever I

am—when some—that is of course I will see to it," she ended rather lamely and in great confusion.

"Just a few minutes, dear," said Mrs. Varney, smiling faintly at the girl's blushing cheeks and not thinking it worth while to correct the misapprehension, "I won't be long." She stepped across the room, but turned in the doorway for her final injunction, "Do be careful, won't you?"

"Careful!" said Caroline to herself, "I should think I would be careful. As if I didn't know enough for that. I can guess what is going on out there in the moonlight. I wouldn't have them disturbed for the world. Why, if I were out there with—with—Will—with anybody, I wouldn't——"

She stopped in great dismay at her own admissions and stood staring toward the front windows, over which Mrs. Varney had most carefully drawn the heavy hangings.

Presently her curiosity got the better of her sense of propriety. She went to the nearest window, pulled the curtains apart a little, and peered eagerly out. She saw nothing, nothing but the trees in the moonlight, that is; Edith and Captain Thorne were not within view nor were they within earshot. She turned to the other window. Now that she had made the plunge, she determined to see what was going on if she could. She drew the couch up before the window and knelt down upon it, and parting the curtains, looked out, but with the same results as before. In this questionable position she was unfortunately caught by Wilfred Varney.

He was dressed in the grey jacket and the

trousers which she had repaired. She had not made a skilful job of her tailoring, but it would serve. The whole suit was worn, ill-fitting, and soiled; but it was whole. That was more than could be said of ninety-nine per cent. of the uniforms commonly seen round about Richmond. Measured by these, Wilfred was sumptuously, even luxuriously, dressed, and the pride expressed in his port and bearing was as complete as it was naïve. He walked softly up the long room, intending to surprise the girl, but boylike, he stumbled over a stool on his way forward, and the young lady turned about quickly and confronted him with an exclamation. Wilfred came close to her and spoke in a low, fierce whisper.

"Mother isn't anywhere about, is she?"

"No," said Caroline in the same tone, "she's just gone upstairs to see Howard, but she is coming back in a few minutes, she said."

"Well," returned Wilfred, throwing his chest out impressively, "I am not running away from her, but if she saw me with these on she might feel funny."

"I don't think," returned Caroline quickly, "that she would feel very funny."

"Well, you know what I mean," said Wilfred, flushing a little. "You know how it is with a fellow's mother."

Caroline nodded gravely.

"Yes, I have learned how it is with mothers," she said, thinking of the mothers she had known since the war began, young though she was.

"Other people don't care," said Wilfred, "but mothers are different."

"Some other people don't care," answered

Caroline softly, fighting hard to keep back a rush of tears.

In spite of herself her eyes would focus themselves upon that little round blood-stained hole in the left breast of the jacket. She had not realised before how straight that bullet had gone to the heart of the other wearer. There was something terribly ominous about it. But Wilfred blundered blindly on, unconscious of this emotion or of its cause. He drew from the pocket in his blouse a paper. He sat down at the table, beckoning Caroline as he did so. The girl came closer and looked over his shoulder as he unfolded the paper.

"I have written that letter," he said, "to the General, my father, that is. Here it is. I have got to send it to him in some way. It is all written but the last words and I am not sure about them. I'm not going to say 'your loving son' or anything of that kind. This is a man's letter, a soldier's letter. I love him, of course, but this is not the time or the place to put that sort of a thing in. I have been telling him——" He happened to glance up as he spoke and discovered to his great surprise that Caroline had turned away from him and was no longer looking at him. "Why, what's the matter?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing, nothing," answered the girl, forcing herself to face him once more.

"I thought you wanted to help me," he continued.

"Oh, yes! I do, I do."

"Well, you can't help me 'way off there," said Wilfred. "Come closer."

He spoke like a soldier already, thought the

girl, but she meekly, for her, obeyed the imperious command. He stared at her, as yet unconscious but strangely agitated nevertheless. The silence was soon insupportable, and Caroline herself broke it.

"The—the——" she pointed at the trousers, "are they how you wanted them?"

"Fine," replied Wilfred; "they are just perfect. There isn't a girl in Richmond who could have done them better. Now about the letter. I want your advice on it; what do you think?"

"Tell me what you said."

"You want to hear it?" asked Wilfred.

"I've got to, haven't I? How could I help you if I didn't know what it was all about?"

"You're a pretty good girl, Caroline. You will help me, won't you?"

Her hand rested on the table as she bent over him, and he laid his own hand upon it and squeezed it warmly, too warmly thought Caroline, as she slowly drew it away and was sorry she did it the moment she had done so.

"Yes, I will help you," she said. "But about the letter? You will have to hurry. I am sure your mother will be here in a short time."

"Well, that letter is mighty important, you know. Everything depends upon it, much more than on mother's letter, I am sure."

"I should think so," said the girl.

She drew a chair up to the table and sat down by the side of the boy.

"I am just going to give it to him strong," said Wilfred.

"That's the way to give it to him," said Caroline. "He's a soldier and he's accustomed to such things."

"You can't fool much with father. He means business," said Wilfred; "but he will find that I mean business, too."

"That's right," assented Caroline sapiently, "everybody has got to mean business now. What did you say to him?"

"I said this," answered the youngster, reading slowly and with great pride, "'General Ransom Varney, Commanding Division, Army of Northern Virginia, Dear Papa'——"

"I wouldn't say 'dear papa' to a General," interrupted Caroline decisively.

"No? What would you say?"

"I would say 'Sir,' of course; that is much more businesslike and soldiers are always so awfully abrupt."

"You are right," said the boy, beginning again, "'General Ransom Varney, Commanding Division, Army of Northern Virginia, Sir'—that sounds fine, doesn't it?"

"Splendid," said the girl, "go on."

"'This is to notify you that I want you to let me join the Army right now. If you don't, I will enlist anyway, that's all. The seventeen call is out and I am not going to wait for the sixteen. Do you think I am a damned coward'——"

Wilfred paused and looked apprehensively at Caroline, who nodded with eyes sparkling brightly.

"That's fine," she said.

"I thought it sounded like a soldier."

"It does; you ought to have heard the Third Virginia swear——"

"Oh," said Wilfred, who did not quite relish that experience; but he went on after a little pause. "'Tom Kittridge has gone; he was

killed yesterday at Cold Harbour. Billie Fisher has gone and so has Cousin Stephen. He is not sixteen, he lied about his age, but I don't want to do that unless you make me. I will, though, if you do. Answer this right now or not at all.' "

"I think that is the finest letter I have ever heard," said Caroline proudly, as Wilfred stopped, laid the paper down, and stared at her.

"Do you really think so?"

"It is the best letter I——"

"I am glad you are pleased with it. Now the next thing is how to end it."

"Why, just end it."

"But how?"

"Sign your name, of course."

"Nothing else?"

"What else is there?"

"Just Wilfred?"

"No, Wilfred Varney."

"That's the thing." He took up a pen from the table and scrawled his name at the bottom of this interesting and historical document. "And you think the rest of it will do?"

"I should think it would," she assented heartily. "I wish your father had it now."

"So do I," said Wilfred. "Maybe it will take two or three days to get it to him and I just can't wait that long."

Caroline rose to her feet suddenly under the stimulus of a bright idea that came into her mind.

"I tell you what we can do."

"What?"

"We can telegraph him," she exclaimed.

"Good idea," cried Wilfred, more and more impressed with Caroline's wonderful resourcefulness, but a disquieting thought immediately

struck him. "Where am I going to get the money?" he asked dubiously.

"It won't take very much."

"It won't? Do you know what they are charging now? Over seven dollars a word only to Petersburg."

"Well, let them charge it," said Caroline calmly, "we can cut it down to only a few words and the address won't cost anything."

"Won't it?"

"No, they never charge for that," continued the girl. "That's a heap of money saved, and then we can use what we save on the address for the rest."

Wilfred stared at her as if this problem in economics was not quite clear to his youthful brain, but she gave him no time to question her ingenious calculations.

"What comes after the address?" she asked in her most businesslike manner.

"'Sir.'"

"Leave that out."

Wilfred swept his pen through it.

"He knows it already," said Caroline. "What's next?"

"'This is to notify you that I want you to let me come right now.'"

"We could leave out that last 'to,'" said Caroline.

Wilfred checked it off, and then said, "'I want you—let me come right now.' That doesn't sound right, and anyway it is such a little word."

"Yes, but it costs seven dollars just the same as a big word," observed Caroline.

"But it doesn't sound right without it," argued

the boy; "we have got to leave it in. What comes after that?"

Caroline in turn took up the note and read,

"'If you don't, I'll come anyhow, that's all.'"

"You might leave out 'that's all,'" said Wilfred.

"No, don't leave that out. It's very important. It doesn't seem to be so important, but it is. It shows—well—it shows that that's all there is about it. That one thing might convince him."

"Yes, but we've got to leave out something."

"Not that, though. Perhaps there is something else. 'The seventeen call is out'—that' got to stay."

"Yes," said Wilfred.

"'The sixteen comes next.' That's just got to stay."

"Of course. Now, what follows?"

"'I'm not going to wait for it,'" read Caroline.

"We can't cut that out," said Wilfred; "we don't seem to be making much progress, do we?"

"Well, we will find something in a moment. 'Do you think I am'——" she hesitated a moment, "'a damned coward,'" she read with a delicious thrill at her rash, vicarious wickedness.

Wilfred regarded her dubiously. He felt as an author does when he sees his pet periods marked out by the blue pencil of the ruthless editor.

"You might leave that out," he began, cutting valiantly at his most cherished and admired phrase.

"No," protested Caroline vehemently, "certainly not! That is the best thing in the whole letter."

"That 'damn' is going to cost us seven dollars, you know."

"It is worth it," said Caroline, "it is the best thing you have written. Your father is a General in the army, he'll understand that kind of language. What's next? I know there's something now."

"'Tom Kittridge has gone. He was killed yesterday at Cold Harbour.'"

"Leave out that about"—she caught her breath, and her eyes fixed themselves once more on that little round hole in the breast of his jacket—"about his being killed."

"But he was killed and so was Johnny Sheldon—I have his uniform you know."

"I know he was, but you don't have to tell your father," said Caroline, choking up, "you don't have to telegraph him the news, do you?"

"No, of course not, but——"

"That's all there is to the letter except the end."

"Why, that leaves it just the same except the part about——"

"Yes," said Caroline in despair, "and after all the work we have done."

"Let's try it again," said Wilfred.

"No," said Caroline, "there is no use. Everything else has got to stay."

"Well, then we can't telegraph it. It would cost hundreds of dollars."

"Yes, we can telegraph it," said Caroline determinedly, "you give it to me. I'll get it sent."

"But how are you going to send it?" asked Wilfred, extending the letter.

"Never you mind," answered the girl.

"See here!" the boy cried. "I am not going to have you spend your money, and——"

"There's no danger of that, I haven't any to spend." She took the letter from his hand. "I reckon Douglass Foray 'll send it for me. He's in the telegraph office and he'll do most anything for me."

"No," said Wilfred sternly.

"What's the reason he won't?" asked the girl.

"Because he won't."

"What do you care so long as he sends it?"

"Well, I do care and that's enough. I'm not going to have you making eyes at Dug Foray on my account."

"Oh, well," said the girl, blushing. "Of course if you feel that way about it, I——"

"That's the way I feel all right. But you won't give up the idea of helping me, will you, because I—feel like that?"

"No," answered Caroline softly, "I'll help you all I can—about that letter, do you mean?"

"Yes, about that letter and about other things, too."

"Give it to me," said the girl, "I will go over it again."

She sat down at the desk, and as she scanned it, Wilfred watched her anxiously. To them Mrs. Varney entered. She had an open letter in one hand and a cap and belt in the other. She stopped in the doorway and motioned for some one in the hall to follow her, and an orderly entered the room. His uniform was covered with dust, his sunburned, grim face was covered with sweat and dust also. He stood in the doorway with the ease of a veteran soldier, that is without the painful effort to be precise or formal

which marks the young aspirant for military honours.

"Wilfred," said Mrs. Varney, quickly approaching him, "here is a letter from your father." She extended the paper. "He sent it by his orderly."

Wilfred stepped closer to the elder woman while Caroline slowly rose from her chair, her eyes fixed on Mrs. Varney.

"What does he say, mother?" asked Wilfred.

"He says——" answered his mother with measured quietness, and controlling herself with the greatest difficulty, "he tells me that—that you—are——" in spite of her tremendous effort, her voice failed her. "Read it yourself, my boy," she whispered pitifully.

The letter was evidently exceedingly brief. A moment put Wilfred in possession of its contents. His mother stood with head averted. Caroline stared with trembling lips, a pale face, and a heaving bosom. It was to the orderly that Wilfred addressed himself.

"I am to go back with you?"

"General's orders, sir," answered the soldier, saluting, "to enter the service. God knows we need everybody now."

"When do we start?" asked Wilfred eagerly, his face flushing as he realised that his fondest desire was now to be gratified.

"As soon as you are ready, sir. I am waiting."

"I am ready now," said Wilfred. He turned to his mother. "You won't mind, mother," he said, his own lips trembling a little for the first time at the sight of her grief.

Mrs. Varney shook her head. She stepped nearer to him, smoothed the hair back from

his forehead, and stretched out her arms to him as if she fain would embrace him, but she controlled herself and handed him the cap and belt.

"Your brother," she said slowly, "seems to be a little better. He wants you to take his cap and belt. I told him your father had sent for you, and I knew you would wish to go to the front at once."

Wilfred took the belt from her trembling hands, and buckled it about him. His mother handed him the cap.

"Howard says he can get another belt when he wants it, and you are to have his blankets, too. I will go and get them."

She turned and left the room. She was nearly at the end of her resisting power, and but for the welcome diversion incident to her departure, she could not have controlled herself longer. The last one! One taken, one trembling, and now Wilfred!

The boy entered into none of the emotions of his mother. He clapped the cap on his head and threw it back.

"Fits me just as if it were made for me," he said, settling the cap firmly in place. "Orderly, I will be with you in a jiffy."

Caroline stood still near the table, her eyes on the floor.

"We won't have to send it now, will we?" he pointed to the letter.

Caroline, with a long, deep sigh, shook her head, and slowly handed the letter to him. Wilfred took it mechanically, his eyes fixed on the girl, who had suddenly grown very white of face, trembly of lip, and teary of eye-lashes.

"You are very good," he said, tearing the letter into pieces, "to help me like you did."

"It was nothing," whispered the girl.

"You can help me again, if you want to."

Caroline lifted her eyes to his face, and he saw within their depths that which encouraged him.

"I can fight twice as well, if——"

Poor little Caroline couldn't trust herself to speak. She nodded through her tears.

"Good-bye," said Wilfred, "you will write to me about helping me to fight twice as well, won't you? You know what I mean?"

Caroline nodded again.

"I wouldn't mind if you telegraphed me that you would."

What might have happened further will never be determined, for at this juncture Mrs. Varney came back with an old faded blanket tied in a roll. She handed it to the boy without speaking. Wilfred threw it over his shoulder, and kissed his mother hurriedly.

"You won't mind much, will you, mother? I will soon be back. Orderly!" he cried.

"Sir."

"I am ready," said Wilfred.

He threw one long, meaning look at Caroline, and followed the soldier out of the door and across the hall. The opening and closing of an outside door was heard, and then all was still. Mrs. Varney held her hand to her heart, and long, shuddering breaths came from her. He might soon be back, but how. She knew all about the famous injunction of the Spartan woman, "With your shield or on it," but somehow she had had no idea of the full significance until it came to her last boy, and for a moment she was forgetful

of poor, little Caroline until she saw the girl wavering toward the door, and there was no disguise about the real tears in her eyes now.

"Are you going, dear?" asked Mrs. Varney, forcing herself to speak.

Caroline nodded her head as before.

"Oh, yes," continued the older woman, "your party, you have to be there."

At that the girl found voice, and without looking back she murmured, "There won't be any party to-night."

CHAPTER VIII

EDITH IS FORCED TO PLAY THE GAME

CAROLINE'S departure was again interrupted by the inopportune re-entrance from the back hall of Mr. Arrelsford, who was accompanied by two soldiers, whom he directed to remain by the door. As he advanced rapidly toward Mrs. Varney, Caroline stepped aside toward the rear window.

"Is he——" began Arrelsford, turning toward the window, and starting back in surprise as he observed Caroline for the first time.

"Yes, he is there," answered the woman.

"Oh, Mrs. Varney," cried Caroline, "there's a heap of soldiers out in your backyard here. You don't reckon anything's the matter, do you?"

The girl did not lower her voice, and was greatly surprised at the immediate order for silence which proceeded from Mr. Arrelsford, whose presence she acknowledged with a very cool, indifferent bow.

"No, there is nothing the matter, dear," said Mrs. Varney. "Martha," she said to the old servant who had come in response to her ring, "I want you to go home with Miss Mitford. You must not go alone, dear. Good-night."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Varney," answered Caroline. "Come, Martha." As she

turned, she hesitated. "You don't reckon she could go with me somewhere else, do you?"

"Why, where else do you want to go at this hour, my dear girl?" asked Mrs. Varney.

"Just to—to the telegraph office," answered Caroline.

Mr. Arrelsford, who had been waiting with ill-concealed impatience during this dialogue, started violently.

"Now!" exclaimed Mrs. Varney in great surprise, not noticing the actions of her latest guest. "At this time of night?"

"Yes," answered Caroline, "it is on very important business, and—I——"

"Oh," returned Mrs. Varney, "if that is the case, Martha must go with you."

"You know we haven't a single servant left at our house," Caroline said in explanation of her request.

"I know," said Mrs. Varney, "and, Martha, don't leave her for an instant."

"No'm," answered Martha, "Ah'll take ca' ob huh."

As soon as she had left the room, passing between the two soldiers, Arrelsford took up the conversation. He spoke quickly and in a sharp voice. He was evidently greatly excited.

"What is she going to do at the telegraph office?" he asked.

"I have no idea," answered the woman.

"Has she had any conversation with him?" said Arrelsford, pointing to the front of the house.

"They were talking together in this room early this evening before you came the first time, but it isn't possible she could——"

"Anything is possible," snapped Arrelsford impatiently. He was evidently determined to suspect everybody, and leave no stone unturned to prevent the failure of his plans. "Corporal," he cried, "have Eddinger follow that girl. He must get to the telegraph office as soon as she does, and don't let any despatch she tries to send get out before I see it. Let her give it in, but hold it. Make no mistake about that. Get an order from the department for you to bring it to me." As the Corporal saluted and turned away to give the order, Arrelsford faced Mrs. Varney again. "Are they both out there?"

"Yes," answered the woman. "Did you bring the man from Libby Prison?"

"I did, the guards have him out in the street on the other side of the house. When we get Thorne in here alone I'll have him brought over to that back window and shoved into the room."

"And where shall I stay?"

"Out there," said Arrelsford, "by the lower door, opening upon the back hall. You can get a good view of everything from there."

"But if he sees me?"

"He won't see you if it is dark in the hall." He turned to the Corporal who had re-entered and resumed his station. "Turn out those lights out there," he said. "We can close these curtains, can't we?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Varney, opening the rear door and drawing the heavy portières, but leaving space between them so that any one in the dark hall could see through them but not be seen from the room.

"I don't want too much light in here, either," said Arrelsford. As he spoke he blew out the

candles in the two candelabra which had been placed on the different tables, and left the large, long room but dimly illuminated by the candles in the sconces on the walls.

Mrs. Varney watched him with fascinated awe. In spite of herself there still lingered a hope that Arrelsford might be mistaken. Thorne had enlisted her interest, and he might under other conditions have aroused her matronly affections, and she was hoping against hope that he might yet prove himself innocent, not only because of his personality but as well because the thought that she might have entertained a spy was repugnant to her, and because of the honour of the Dumont family, which was one of the oldest and most important ones in the western hills of the Old Dominion.

Arrelsford meantime completed his preparations by moving the couch which Caroline Mitford had placed before the window back to the wall.

"Now, Mrs. Varney," he said, stepping far back out of sight of the window, "will you open the curtains? Do it casually, carelessly, please, so as not to awaken any suspicion if you are seen."

"But your soldiers, won't they——"

"They are all at the back of the house. They came in the back way, and the field in front is absolutely clear, although I have men concealed in the street to stop any one who may attempt to escape that way."

Mrs. Varney walked over to the window and drew back the curtains. She stood for a moment looking out into the clear, peaceful quietness of a soft spring night. The moon was full, and being somewhat low shone through the long windows

and into the room, the candle light not being bright enough to dim its radiance. Her task being completed, she turned, and once more the man who was in command pointed across the hall toward the room on the other side.

"Are those women in there yet?" he asked peremptorily.

"Yes."

"Where is the key?"

Mrs. Varney left the room and went to the door.

"It is on this side," she said.

"Will you lock it, please?"

The woman softly turned the key in the lock, and returned to the drawing-room without a sound. As she did so the noise of the opening of one of the long French windows in the front of the room attracted the attention of both of them. Edith Varney entered the room nervously and stepped forward. She began breathlessly, in a low, feverishly excited voice.

"Mamma!"

Mrs. Varney hurried toward her and caught her outstretched hand.

"I want to speak to you," whispered the girl.

"We can't wait," said Arrelsford, stepping forward.

"You must," persisted the girl. She turned to her mother again, "I can't do it, I can't! Oh, let me go!"

"But, my dear," said her mother, "you were the one who suggested that——"

"But I was sure then, and now——"

"Has he confessed?" asked Mrs. Varney.

"No, no," answered the girl with a glance of fear and apprehension toward Arrelsford, who stood staring menacingly at her elbow.

"Don't speak so loud," whispered the Secret Service Agent.

"Edith," said her mother soothingly, "what is it that has changed you?"

She waited for an answer, but none came. The girl's face had been very pale but it now flushed suddenly with colour.

"Dear," said her mother, "you must tell me."

Edith motioned Mr. Arrelsford away. He went with ill-concealed impatience to the far side of the room and waited nervously to give the signal, anxious lest something should miscarry because of this unfortunate unwillingness of the girl to play her part.

"What is it, dear?" whispered her mother.

"Mamma," said Edith, she forced the words out, "he—he—loves me."

"Impossible!" returned Mrs. Varney, controlling her voice so that the other occupant of the room could not hear.

"Yes," faltered the girl, "and I—some one else must do it."

"You don't mean," said Mrs. Varney, "that you return——"

But Mr. Arrelsford's patience had been strained to the breaking point. He did not know what interchange was going on between the two women, but it must be stopped. He came forward resolutely. The girl saw his determination in his face.

"No, no," she whispered, "not that, not now!"

She shrank away from him as she spoke.

"But, Edith," said Mrs. Varney, "more reason now than ever."

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Mr. Arrelsford, "but we must go on."

"But why—why are you doing this?" asked Edith, pleading desperately.

"Because I please," snapped out the Secret Service Agent, and it was quite evident that he was pleased. Some of his satisfaction was due to the fact that he had by his own efforts at last succeeded in unearthing a desperate plot, and had his hands on the plotters. That he was thereby serving his country and demonstrating his fitness for his position of responsibility and trust also added to his satisfaction, but this was greatly enhanced by the fact that Thorne was his rival, and he could make a guess that he was a successful rival in love as well as in war.

"You have never pleased before," persisted Edith. "Hundreds of suspicious cases have come up—hundreds of men have been run down—but you preferred to sit at your desk in the War Department, until——"

"Edith! Edith!" interposed her mother.

"I can't discuss that now," said Arrelsford.

"No, we will not discuss it. I will have nothing more to do with the affair."

"You won't," whispered Arrelsford threateningly.

"Don't say that," urged Mrs. Varney.

"Nothing, nothing at all," said Edith.

"At your own suggestion, Miss Varney," persisted the Secret Service Agent vehemently, "I agreed to accept a plan by which we could criminate this friend of yours or establish his innocence. When everything is ready you propose to withdraw and make the experiment a failure, perhaps allowing him to escape altogether and being a party to treason against your own country."

Edith looked from Arrelsford's set face, with his bitter words, the truth of which she was too just not to acknowledge, ringing in her ears, to the face of her mother. It was a sweet face, full of sympathy and love, but it was set in the same way as the man's. The patriotism of the woman was aroused. The kind of help that Edith wanted in her mother's look she did not find there.

"You mustn't do this, Edith; you must do your part," said Mrs. Varney.

The resolution of the girl gave way.

"He is there," she faltered piteously, "he is there at the further end of the veranda. What more do you want of me?" Her voice rose in spite of her efforts to control herself.

"Call him to the room, and do it naturally. If any one else should do it he would suspect something immediately and be on his guard."

"Very well," said the girl helplessly. "I will call him."

She turned toward the window.

"Wait," said Arrelsford, "one thing more. I want him to have this paper." He handed Edith the communication which had been taken from Jonas earlier in the evening.

"What am I to do with this?" asked the girl, taking it.

"Give it to him, and tell him where it came from. Tell him old Jonas got it from a prisoner at Libby Prison and brought it to you."

"But why am I to do this?" asked the girl.

"Why not? If he is innocent, what's the harm? If not, if he is in the plot and we can't catch him otherwise, the message on the paper will send him to the telegraph office to-night, and that's where we want him."

"But I never promised that," said the girl with obvious reluctance to do anything not only that might tend to harm the suspected, but that might work to the furtherance of Arrelsford's designs.

"Do you still believe him innocent?" sneered the man.

Edith lifted her head and for the first time she looked Arrelsford full in the face.

"I still believe him innocent," answered the girl, slowly and with deliberate emphasis.

"Then why are you afraid to give him the paper?" asked Arrelsford, directly with cunning adroitness.

The girl, thus entrapped, clasped the paper to her breast, and turned toward the window. Her mind was made up, but it was not necessary for her to call. Her ear, tuned to every sound he made, caught the noise of his footfall on the porch. She turned her head and spoke to the other two.

"Captain Thorne is coming," she whispered expressionlessly, "unless you want to be seen, you had better go."

"Here, this way, Mrs. Varney," said Arrelsford, taking that lady by the arm and going down to the far end to the door covered by the portières.

The two disappeared, and it was impossible for a soul to see them in the darkness of the hall, although they could see clearly enough, even in the dimly lighted drawing-room, everything that would happen. Edith stood as if rooted to the floor, the paper still in her hand, when Thorne opened the sash which she had closed behind her and entered in his turn the window through which she had come a short time before. He stepped eagerly toward her.

"You were so long," he whispered, "coming for me, that——" He stopped abruptly, and looked at her face, "Is anything the matter?"

"No."

"You had been away such a long time that I thought——"

"Only a few minutes."

"Only a few years," said the man passionately. His voice was low and gently modulated, not because he had anything to conceal but because of the softness of the moonlight and the few candles dimly flickering upon the walls of the great room, the look in the girl's eyes, and the feeling in his heart. A few minutes, the girl had said!—Ah, it was indeed a few years to him.

"If it was a few years to you," returned the girl with a violent effort at lightness, although her heart was torn to pieces with the emotions of the moment, "what a lot of time there is."

"No," said Thorne, "there is only to-night."

Edith threw out her hand to check what she would fain have heard, but Thorne caught it. He came closer to her.

"There's only to-night, and you in the world," he said.

"You overwhelm me."

"I can't help myself. I came here determined not to tell you how I loved you, and for the last half hour I have been telling you nothing else. I could tell you all my life and never finish. Ah, my darling, my darling,—there's only to-night and you."

Edith swayed toward him for a moment, completely influenced by his ardour, but then drew back.

"No, no," she faltered. "You mustn't."

She glanced around the room apprehensively. "No, no, not now!"

"You are right," said the man. She dragged herself away from him. He would not retain her against her will, and without a struggle he released her hand. "You are right. Don't mind what I said, Miss Varney. I have forgotten myself, believe me." He drew further away from her. "I came to make a brief call, to say goodbye, and——"

He turned and walked toward the hall door, after making her a low bow, and it was not without a feeling of joy that she noticed that he walked unsteadily, blindly.

"Oh, Captain Thorne," she said, just as he had reached the door, "I——"

He stopped and looked back.

"Before you go I want to ask your advice about something."

"My advice?"

"Yes, it seems to be a military matter, and——"

"What is it?" asked Thorne, turning back.

"What do you think this means?" said the girl, handing him the folded despatch.

She had intended to look him full in the face as he took it, but at the last moment her courage failed her. She looked away and did not see the instant but quickly mastered start of surprise. She was only conscious that Thorne had possessed himself of the document.

"What is it?" asked Thorne, holding it in his hand.

"That is what I want you to tell me," said the girl.

"Oh, don't you know?" said Thorne, now entirely master of himself.

"No," answered the girl, but there was something in her voice which now fully aroused the suspicions of the man.

"It appears to be a note from some one," he said casually, "but it is so dark in here. With your permission, I will light some of the candles on the table, and then we can see what it is."

He took one of the candles from the sconces on the wall and lighted the candelabra that stood on the nearest table. Holding the paper near the light, he glanced around rapidly, and then read it, giving no outward evidence of his surprise and alarm, although the girl was now watching him narrowly. He glanced at her and then looked at the paper again, and slowly read aloud its message.

"'*Attack to-night?*'" he said very deliberately. "Umph, '*Plan 3? Attack to-night, plan 3!*' This seems to be in some code, Miss Varney, or a puzzle."

"It was taken from a Yankee prisoner."

"From a Yankee prisoner!" he exclaimed in brilliantly assumed surprise.

"Yes, one captured to-day. He is down at Libby now. He gave it to one of our servants, old Jonas, and——"

"That's a little different," said Thorne, examining the paper again. "It puts another face on the matter. This may be something important. '*Attack to-night,*'" he read again, "'*Plan 3, use telegraph*'! This sounds important to me, Miss Varney. It looks to me like a plot to use the Department Telegraph lines. To whom did Jonas give it?"

"To no one."

"Well, how did you——"

"We took it away from him," answered Edith.

This was a very different statement from her original intention, but for the moment the girl forgot her part.

"Oh," said Thorne, "I think that was a mistake."

"A mistake?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"You should have let him deliver it, but it is too late now. Never mind." He turned toward the door.

Edith caught him by the arm. Was he going out to certain death or what?

"What are you going to do?" she asked breathlessly.

"Find Jonas, and make him tell for whom this paper was intended. He is the man we want."

The girl released him, and caught her throat with her hand.

"Captain Thorne," she choked out, and there was joy and triumph in her face, "they have lied about you."

Thorne turned to her quickly.

"Lied about me! he exclaimed. "What do you mean?'

He caught the girl's hands in his and bent over her.

"Don't be angry," pleaded Edith, "I didn't think it would be like this."

"Yes, yes, but what do you mean?"

Edith sought to draw her hands away from him, but Thorne would not be denied.

"I must know," he said.

"Let me go," pleaded the girl, "don't you understand——"

But what she might have said further was interrupted by the sharp, stern voice of the Corporal outside. He spoke loud and clearly, there was no necessity for precaution now.

"This way! Look out for that side, will you?"

Thorne released the hands of the woman he loved and stood listening. Edith Varney took advantage of such a diversion to dart through the upper door, the nearer one, into the hall.

"I don't want to be here now," she said, as she flew away.

Thorne's hand went to his revolver which hung at his belt. He had not time to draw it before the Corporal and the two men burst through the door. There were evidently others outside. Thorne's hand fell away from his revolver, and his position was one of charming nonchalance.

"Out here!" cried the Corporal to one of the soldiers. "Look out there!" pointing to the doorway through which the two men instantly disappeared.

"What is it, Corporal?" asked Thorne composedly.

The Corporal turned and saluted.

"Prisoner, sir, broke out of Libby! We've run him down the street, and he turned in here somewhere. If he comes in that way, would you be good enough to let us know?"

"Go on, Corporal," said Thorne coolly. "I'll look out for this window."

He stepped down the long room toward the far window, drew the curtains, and with his hand on his revolver, peered out into the trees beyond the front of the house.

CHAPTER IX

THE SHOT THAT KILLED

A GLANCE through the window showed Captain Thorne that the yard beyond, which had been empty all evening, was now full of armed men. The Corporal had gone out through the hall door back of the house whence he had entered. There was no doubt but that the back windows would be equally well guarded. The house was surrounded, no escape was possible. He was trapped, virtually a prisoner, although for the time being, they had left him a certain liberty—the liberty of that one large room! It was quite evident to him that he was the object of their suspicions, and he more than feared that his real affiliations had been at last discovered.

Apparently, there would be no opportunity now in which he could carry out his part in the cunningly devised scheme of attack. "*Plan 3*" would inevitably result in failure, as so many previous plans had resulted, because he would not be able to send the orders that would weaken the position. The best he could hope for, in all probability, was the short shrift of a spy. He had staked his life on the game and it appeared that he had lost.

Nay, more than life had been wagered, honour. He knew the contempt in which the spy was

held; he knew that even the gallantry and intrepidity of André and Hale had not saved them from opprobrium and disgrace.

And there was even more than honour upon the board. His love! Not the remotest idea of succumbing to the attractions of Edith Varney ever entered his head when he attempted the desperate, the fatal rôle. At first he had regarded the Varney house and herself as a chessboard and a pawn in the game. The strength of character which had enabled him to assume the unenviable part he played, because of his country's need, for his country's good, and which would have carried him through the obloquy and scorn that were sure to be visited upon him—with death at the end!—did not stand him in good stead when it came to thoughts of her. Until he yielded to his passion, and broke his self-imposed vow of silence, he had fought a good fight. Now he realised that the woman who should accept his affections would compromise herself for ever in the eyes of everything she held dear, even if he succeeded and lived, which was unlikely.

He had never, so he fancied, in the least and remotest way given her any evidence that he loved her. In reality, she had read him like an open book, as women always do. He had come there that night to get the message from Jonas, and then to bid her good-bye for ever, without disclosing the state of his affections. If he succeeded in manipulating the telegraph and carrying out his end of the project, he could see no chance of escape. Ultimate detection and execution appeared certain, and any avowal would therefore be useless. But he had counted without her. She had shown her feelings, and

he had fallen. To the temptation of her presence and her artless disclosure, he had not been able to make adequate resistance.

He was the last man on earth to blame her or to reproach her for that; but the fierce, impetuous temperament of the man was overwhelming when it once broke loose, and he felt that he must tell her or die.

Because of his iron self-repression for so long he was the less able to stand the pressure in the end. He had thrown everything to the winds, and had told her how he loved her.

Out there in the moonlight in the rose arbour, the scent of the flowers, the southern night wind, the proximity of the girl, her eyes shining like stars out of the shadows in which they stood, the pallor of her face, the rise and fall of her bosom, the fluttering of her hand as unwittingly or wittingly, who knows, she touched him, had intoxicated him, and his love and passion had broken all bounds, and he had spoken to her and she had answered. She loved him. What did that mean to him now?

Sometimes woman's love makes duty easy, sometimes it makes it hard. Sometimes it is the crown which victors wear, and sometimes it is the pall that overshadows defeat.

What Edith Varney knew or suspected concerning him, he could not tell. That she knew something, that she suspected something, had been evident, but whatever her knowledge and suspicion, they were not sufficiently powerful or telling to prevent her from returning love for love, kiss for kiss. But did she love him in spite of her knowledge and suspicion? The problem was too great for his solution then.

These things passed through his mind as he stood there by the window, with his hand on his revolver, waiting. It was all he could do. Sometimes even to the most fiery and the most alert of soldiers comes the conviction that there is nothing to do but wait. And if he thinks of it, he will sympathise with the women who are left behind in times of war, who have little to do but wait.

The room had suddenly become his world, the walls his horizon, the ceiling his sky. At any exit he would find the way barred. Why had they left him in the room, free, armed, his revolver in his hand ?

None but the bravest would have entered upon such a career as he had chosen. His nerves were like steel in the presence of danger. He had trembled before the woman in the garden a moment since ; the stone walls of the house were no more rigidly composed than he in the drawing-room now. It came to him that there was nothing left but one great battle in that room unless they shot him from behind door or window or portière, giving him no chance. If they did confront him openly he would show them that if he had chosen the Secret Service and the life of a spy he could fight and die like a man and a soldier. He held some lives within the chamber of his revolver, and they should pay did they give him but a chance.

Indeed, they were already giving him a chance, he thought to himself as he waited and listened. He was utterly unable to divine why he was at liberty in the room, and why he was left alone, or what was toward.

In the very midst of these crowding and tumul-

tuous thoughts which ran through his mind in far, far less time than it has taken to record them, he heard a noise at the window at the farther side of the room, as if some one fumbled at the catch. Instantly Thorne shrank back behind the portières of the window he was guarding, not completely concealing himself but sufficiently hid as to be unobserved except by careful scrutiny in the dim light. Once more he clutched the butt of his revolver swinging at his waist. He bent his body slightly, and even the thought of Edith Varney passed from his mind. He stood ready, powerful, concentrated, determined, confronting an almost certain enemy with the fierce heart and envenomed glance of the fighter at bay.

He had scarcely assumed this position when the window was opened, and a man was thrust violently through into the room. At the first glance, Thorne as yet unseen, recognised the newcomer as his elder brother, Henry Dumont. Unlike the two famous brothers of the parable, these two loved each other.

Thorne's muscles relaxed, his hand still clutched the butt of his revolver, he was still alert, but here was not an enemy. He began at once to fathom something at least of the plan and the purpose of the people who had trapped him. In a flash he perceived that his enemies were not yet in possession of all the facts which would warrant them in laying hands upon him. He was suspected, but the final evidence upon which to turn suspicion into certainty was evidently lacking. He could feel, although he could not see them, that every door and window had eyes solely for him, and that he was closely watched for some false move which would betray him. The plan

for which he had ventured so much was still possible; he had not yet failed. His heart leaped in his breast. The clouds around his horizon lifted a little. There was yet a possibility that he could succeed, that he could carry out his part of the cunningly devised and desperate undertaking, the series of events of which this night and the telegraph office were to be the culmination.

A less cautious and a less resourceful man might have evinced some emotion, might have gone forward or spoken to the newcomer, would have at least done something to have attracted his attention, but save for that relaxation of the tension, which no one could by any possibility observe, Thorne stood motionless, silent, waiting; just as he might have stood and waited had he been what he seemed and had the newcomer been utterly unknown and indifferent to him.

His brother was dressed in the blue uniform of the United States; like the others it had seen good service, but as Thorne glanced from his own clothes to those of his brother, the blood came to his face, it was like seeing his own flag again. For a fleeting moment he wished that he had on his own rightful uniform himself and that he had never put it off for anything; but duty is not made up of wishes, gratified or ungratified, and the thought passed as he watched the other man.

Henry Dumont had been thrust violently into the room by the soldiers outside. He had been captured, as Arrelsford had said, earlier in the day; he had allowed himself to be taken. He had been thrust into Libby Prison with dozens of prisoners taken in the same sortie. He had

not been searched, but then none of the others had been ; had he been selected for that unwonted immunity alone it would have awakened his suspicions, but the Confederates had made a show of great haste in disposing of their prisoners and had promised to search them in the morning. Therefore, Henry Dumont had retained the paper which later he had given Jonas, when by previous arrangement he made his daily visit to the prison.

He had been greatly surprised, when about a quarter to nine o'clock, a squad of soldiers had taken him from the prison, had marched him hurriedly through the streets with which he was entirely unfamiliar, and had taken him to the residence section of the city, and had halted at the back of a big house. He had asked no questions, and no explanations had been vouchsafed to him. He was more surprised than ever when he was taken up to the porch, the window was opened, and he was thrust violently into a room, so violently that he staggered and had some difficulty in recovering his balance.

He made a quick inspection of the room. Thorne, in the deeper shadows at the farther end of the room was invisible to him. He stood motionless save for the turning of his head as he looked around him. He moved a few steps toward the end of the room, opposite his entrance, passed by the far door opening into the back hall which was covered with portières, and went swiftly toward the near door into the front hall. The door was slightly ajar, and as he came within range of the opening he saw in the shadows of the hall, crossed bayonets and men. No escape that way !

He went on past the door toward the large

windows at the front of the house and in another moment would have been at the front window where Thorne stood. The latter dropped the curtain and stepped out into the room.

For the thousandth part of a second the two brothers stared at each other, and then in a fiercely intense voice, Thorne, playing his part, desperately called out:

"Halt! You are a prisoner!"

Both brothers were quick witted, both knew that they were under the closest observation, both realised that they were expected to betray relationship, which would incriminate both, and probably result fatally for one and certainly ruin the plan. Thorne's cue was to regard his brother as the prisoner whom it was important to arrest, and Dumont's cue was to regard his brother as an enemy with whom it was his duty to struggle. The minds of the two were made up instantly. With a quick movement Dumont sought to pass his brother, but with a movement equally as rapid, Thorne leaped upon him, shouting again:

"Halt, I say!"

The two men instantly grappled. It was no mimic struggle that they engaged in, either. They were of about equal height and weight, if anything Thorne was the stronger, but this advantage was offset by the fact that he had been recently ill, and the two fought therefore on equal terms at first. It was a fierce, desperate grapple in which they met. As they struggled violently, both by a common impulse, reeled toward that part of the room near the mantel which was farthest away from doors or windows, and where they would be the least likely to be overheard or to be more closely observed.

As they fought together, Thorne called out again:

"Corporal of the Guard, here is your man! Corporal of the Guard, what are you doing?"

At that instant the two reeling bodies struck the wall next to the mantel with a fearful smash, and a chair that stood by was overturned by a quick movement on the part of Henry Dumont, who did not know his brother had already received the important message. In the confusion of the moment, he hissed in Thorne's ear:

"*Attack to-night, plan 3, use telegraph!* Did you get that?"

"Yes," returned Thorne, still keeping up the struggle.

"Good," said Dumont. "They are watching us. Shoot me in the leg."

"No, I can't do it," whispered Thorne.

All the while the two men were reeling and staggering and struggling against the wall and furniture. The encounter would have deceived the most suspicious.

"Shoot, shoot," said the elder.

"I can't shoot my own brother," the younger panted out.

"It is the only way to throw them off the scent," persisted Dumont.

"I won't do it," answered Thorne, and then he shouted again:

"Corporal of the Guard, I have your prisoner!"

"Let me go, damn you!" roared Dumont furiously, making another desperate effort,—"if you don't do it, I will," he added under his breath. "Give me the revolver!"

"No, no, Harry," was the whispered reply,

and "Surrender, curse you!" the shouted answer. "You'll hurt yourself," he pleaded.

"I don't care," muttered Dumont. "Let me have it."

His hands slipped down from Thorne's shoulders and grasped the butt of the revolver. The two grappled for it fiercely, but the struggle was beginning to tell on Thorne, who was not yet in full possession of his physical vitality. His long illness had sapped his strength.

"Don't, don't, for God's sake!" he whispered, and then shouted desperately, "Here's your man, Corporal, what's the matter with you?"

"Give me that gun," said Dumont, and in spite of himself his voice rose again. There was nothing suspicious in the words, it was what he might have said had the battle been a real one; as he spoke by a more violent effort he wrenched the weapon from the holster and away from Thorne's detaining hand. The latter sought desperately to repossess himself of it.

"Look out, Harry! You'll hurt yourself," he implored, but the next moment by a superhuman effort Dumont threw him back. As Thorne staggered, Dumont turned the pistol on himself. Recovering himself with incredible swiftness, Thorne leaped at his brother, and the two figures went down together with a crash in the midst of which rang out the sharp report of the heavy service weapon. Instead of shooting himself harmlessly in the side, in the struggle Dumont had unfortunately shot himself through the lung.

Not at first comprehending exactly what had happened, Thorne rose to his feet, took the revolver from the other's hand, and stood over

the body of his mortally wounded brother, the awful anguish of his heart in his face. Fortunately, they were near the far end of the room, next the wall, and no one could see the look in Thorne's eyes or the distortion of his features in his horror.

"Harry!" he whispered. "My God, you have shot yourself!"

But Henry Dumont was past speaking. He simply smiled at his brother, and closed his eyes. The next instant the room was filled with light and sound. From every window and door people poured in; the soldiers from the porches, from the hall, Mrs. Varney, Arrelsford and Edith; from the other side of the hall a hubbub of screams and cries rose from behind the locked door where the sewing women sat. Martha brought up the rear with lights, which Arrelsford took from her and set on the table. The room was again brightly illuminated.

As they crowded through the various entrances, their eyes fell upon Thorne. He was leaning nonchalantly against the table, his revolver in his hand, a look of absolute indifference upon his face. His acting was superb had they but known it. He could not betray himself now and make vain his brother's sublime act of self-sacrifice for the cause. There was a tumult of shouts and sudden cries:

"Where is he? What has he done? This way now!"

Most of those who entered had eyes only for the man lying upon the floor, blood welling darkly through his grey shirt exposed by the opening of his coat which had been torn apart in the struggle. Three people had eyes only for Thorne, the man

who hated him, the girl who loved him, and the woman who suspected him. Between the soldiers and these three stood the Corporal of the Guard, representing as it were, the impartial law.

Thorne did not glance once at the girl who loved him, or at the man who hated him, or at the woman who suspected him. He fixed his eyes upon the Corporal of the Guard.

"There's your prisoner, Corporal," he said calmly, without a break in his voice, although such anguish possessed him as he had never before experienced and lived through, but his control was absolutely perfect.

And his quiet words and quiet demeanour increased the hate of one man, and the suspicions of one woman, and the love and admiration of the other.

"There's your prisoner," he said, slipping his revolver slowly back into its holster. "We had a bit of a struggle and I had to shoot him. Look out for him."

BOOK III

WHAT HAPPENED AT TEN O'CLOCK

CHAPTER X

CAROLINE MITFORD WRITES A DESPATCH

The War Department Telegraph Office had once been a handsome apartment, one of those old-fashioned, heavily corniced, marble-mantelled, low-windowed, double-doored rooms in a public building. It was now in a state of extreme dilapidation, the neglected and forlorn condition somehow being significant of the moribund Confederacy in which practically everything was either dead or dying but the men and women.

A large double door in one corner gave entrance to a corridor. The doors were of handsome mahogany, but they had been kicked and battered until varnish and polish had both disappeared and they looked as dilapidated as the cob-webbed corners and the broken mouldings. On the other side of the room, three long French windows gave entrance to a shallow balcony of cast iron fantastically moulded, which hung against the outer wall. Beyond this the observer peering through the dusty panes could discern the large white pillars of the huge porch which overhung the front of the building. Further away beyond the shadow of the porch were visible the lights of the sleeping town, seen dimly in the bright moonlight.

The handsome furniture which the room had

probably once contained, had been long since displaced by the rude telegraph equipment, and the heavy plaster cornices and mouldings were sadly marred by telegraph wires which ran down the walls to the tables, rough pine affairs, which carried the instruments. There were two of these tables, each with a telegraph key at either end. One of them stood near the centre of the room, and the other some distance away was backed up against the fine old marble mantel, chipped, battered, ruined like the rest of the room. For the rest, the apartment contained a desk, shelves with the batteries on them, and half a dozen chairs of the commonest and cheapest variety. The floor was bare, dusty, and tobacco stained. The sole remnant of the ancient glory of the room was a large handsome old clock on the wall above the mantel, the hands of which pointed to the hour of ten.

But if the room itself was in a dingy and even dirty condition, the occupants were very much alive. One young man, Lieutenant Allison, sat at the table under the clock, and another, Lieutenant Foray, at the table in the centre of the room. Both were busy sending or receiving messages. The instruments kept up a continuous clicking, heard distinctly above the buzz of conversation which came from half a dozen youngsters, scarcely more than boys, grouped together at the opposite side of the room, waiting to take to the various offices of the Department, or to the several officials of the government, the messages which were constantly being handed out to them by the two military operators.

In the midst of this busy activity there came the noise of drums, faintly at first, but presently

growing clearer and louder, while the tramp of many feet sounded in the street below.

"What's that?" asked one messenger of the other.

"I don't know," was the answer, "troops of some kind. I'll look out and see."

He stepped to one of the long windows, opened it, and went out on the balcony. The other young fellows clustered at his back or peered through the other windows.

"It's the Richmond Greys," said the observer outside.

There was an outburst of exclamations from the room, except from the operators, who had no time to spare from their work.

"Yes, that's what they are. You can see their uniforms. They must be sending them down to the lines at Petersburg," said another.

"Well, I don't believe they would send the Greys out unless there was something going on to-night," observed a third.

"To-night, why, good heavens, it's as quiet as a tomb," broke in a fourth. "I don't hear a sound from the front."

"That's probably what's worrying them. It is so damned unusual," returned the first messenger.

"Things have come to a pretty pass if the Grandfathers of the Home Guard have got to go to the front," remarked another.

"Following in the footsteps of their grandsons," said the first. "I wish I could go. I hate this business of carrying telegrams and——"

"Messenger here!" cried Lieutenant Foray, folding up a message and inserting it in its envelope.

The nearest youngster detached himself from the group while all of them turned away from the windows, stepped to the side of the officer, and saluted.

"War Department," said Foray tersely. "Tell the Secretary it's from General Lee, and here's a duplicate which you are to give to the President."

"Very good, sir," said the messenger, taking the message and turning away.

As he passed out of the door, an orderly entered the room, stepped to the side of Lieutenant Foray, the senior of the two officers on duty, clicked his heels together, and saluted.

"Secretary's compliments, sir, and he wants to know if there is anything from General Lee," he said.

"My compliments to the Secretary," returned the Lieutenant. "I have just sent a message to his office with a duplicate for the President."

"The President's still with the Cabinet, sir," returned the orderly. "He didn't go home. The Secretary's there, too. They want an operator immediately to take down some cipher telegrams."

Lieutenant Foray looked over to his subordinate.

"Got anything on, Charlie?" he called out.

"Not right now," answered Lieutenant Allison.

"Well, go over with the orderly to the Cabinet room and take down their ciphers. Hurry back though," said Foray as Allison slipped on his coat—both officers had been working in their shirt sleeves—"we need you here. We are so short-handed in the office now that I don't know

how we are going to get through to-night. I can't handle four instruments, and——"

"I will do my best," said Allison, turning away rapidly.

He bowed as he did so to a little party which at that moment entered the room through the door, obstructing his passage. There were two very spick and span young officers with Miss Caroline Mitford between them, while just behind loomed the ponderous figure of old Martha.

"You wait in the hall here, Martha; I won't be long," said Caroline, pausing a moment to let the others precede her.

The two young men stopped on either side of the door and waited for her.

"Miss Mitford," said the elder, "this is the Department Telegraph Office."

"Thank you," said Caroline, entering the room with only the briefest of acknowledgments of the profound bows of her escorts.

She was evidently very much agitated and troubled over what she was about to attempt. The two young men followed her as she stepped down the long room.

"I am afraid you have gone back on the Army, Miss Mitford," said one of them pleasantly.

"Gone back on the Army, why?" asked Caroline mystified.

"Seems like we should have a salute as you went by."

"Oh, yes," said the girl.

She raised her hand and saluted in a perfunctory and absent-minded manner, then turned away from them. She nodded to the messengers, some of whom she knew. One of them, who knew her best, stepped forward.

"Good-evening, Miss Mitford, could we do anything in the office for you to-night?" he asked.

"Oh, yes,—you can. I want to send a—a telegram."

The other of the young officers who had escorted her, who had remained silent, now entered the conversation.

"Have you been receiving some bad news, Miss Mitford?" he asked sympathetically.

"Oh, no."

"Maybe some friend of yours has gone to the front, and——" interposed the first officer.

"Well, supposing he had," said Caroline, "would you call that bad news?"

"I don't know as you would exactly like to——"

"Let me tell you," said Caroline, "as you don't seem to know, that all my friends have gone to the front."

There was an emphasis on the pronoun which should have warned the young soldier what was about to occur, but he rushed blindly to his doom.

"I hope not all, Miss Mitford," he replied.

"Yes, all," rejoined Caroline, making the "all" very emphatic, "for if they did not they wouldn't be my friends."

"But some of us are obliged to stay here to take care of you, you know," contributed the other young man.

"Well, there are altogether too many of you trying to take care of me," said Caroline saucily, with some return of her usual lightness, "and you are all discharged."

"Do you mean that, Miss Mitford?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, I suppose if we are really discharged, we will have to go," returned the other.

"Yes," said his companion regretfully, "but we are mighty sorry to see you in such low spirits."

"Would you like to put me in real good spirits, you two?" asked Caroline, resolved to read these young dandies who were staying at home a lesson.

"Wouldn't we?" they both cried together. "There's nothing we would like better."

"Well, I will tell you just what to do then," returned the girl gravely and with deep meaning.

Everybody in the room, with the exception of Lieutenant Foray, was now listening intently.

"Start out this very night," said the girl, "and don't stop till you get to where my real friends are, lying in trenches and ditches and earth-works between us and the Yankee guns."

"But really, Miss Mitford," began one, his face flushing at her severe rebuke, "you don't absolutely mean that."

"So far as we are concerned," said one of the messengers, including his companions with a sweep of his hand, "we'd like nothing better, but they won't let us go, and——"

"I know they won't," said Caroline, "but so far as you two gentlemen are concerned, I really mean it. Go and fight the Yankees a few days and lie in ditches a few nights until those uniforms you've got on look as if they might have been of some use to somebody. If you are so mighty anxious to do something for me, that is what you can do. It is the only thing I want, it is the only thing anybody wants."

"Messenger here!" cried Lieutenant Foray as the two young officers, humiliated beyond expression by the taunts of the impudent young girl, backed away and finally managed to make an ungraceful exit through the open door, followed by the titters of the messengers, who took advantage of the presence of the girl to indulge in this grave breach of discipline.

"Messenger!" cried Foray impatiently.

"Here, sir," came the answer.

"Commissary General's office!" was the injunction with which Foray handed the man the telegram.

He looked up at the same time, and with a great start of surprise caught sight of Caroline at the far end of the long room.

"Lieutenant Foray," began the girl.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Mitford," said the operator, scrambling to his feet and making a frantic effort to get into his coat. "I heard some one come in, but I was busy with an important message and didn't appreciate that——"

"No, never mind, don't put on your coat," said Caroline. "I came on business, and——"

"You want to send a telegram?" asked the Lieutenant.

"Yes."

"I am afraid we can't do anything for you here, Miss Mitford, this is the War Department Official Telegraph Office, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Caroline, "but it is the only way to send it where I want it to go, and I——"

At that moment the clicking of a key called Lieutenant Foray away.

"Excuse me," he said, stepping quickly to his table.

Miss Mitford, who had never before been in a telegraph office, was very much mystified by the peremptory manner in which the officer had cut her short, but she had nothing to do but wait. Presently the message was transcribed, another messenger was called.

"Over to the Department, quick as you can go. They are waiting for it," said Foray. "Now, what was it you wanted me to do, Miss Mitford?"

"Just to—to send a telegram," faltered Caroline.

"It's private business, is it not?" said Foray.

"Yes, it is strictly private."

"Then you will have to get an order from—"

"That is what I thought," said Caroline, "so here it is."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" returned Foray, taking the paper. "Oh,—Major Selwin——"

"Yes, he's—he's one of my friends."

"It's all right then," interposed the Lieutenant, who was naturally very businesslike and peremptory.

He pushed a chair to the other side of the table, placed a small sheet of paper on the table in front of her, and shoved the pen and ink conveniently to hand.

"You can write there, Miss Mitford," he said.

"Thank you," said Caroline, looking rather ruefully at the tiny piece of paper which had been provided for her.

Paper was a scarce article then, and every scrap was precious. She decided that such a piece was not sufficient for her purposes, and

when Lieutenant Foray's back was turned she took a larger piece of paper of sufficient capacity to contain her important message, to the composition of which she proceeded with much difficulty and many pauses and sighs.

CHAPTER XI

MR. ARRELSFORD AGAIN INTERPOSES

NOBODY had any time to devote to Miss Mitford just then, for a perfect rain of messages came and went as she slowly composed her own despatch. Messengers constantly came in while others went out. The lines were evidently busy that night. Finally there came a pause in the despatches coming and going, and Foray remembering her, looked over toward the other end of the table where she sat.

"Is that message of yours ready yet, Miss Mitford?" he asked.

"Yes," said Caroline, rising and folding it. "Of course you have got to take it."

"Certainly," returned the operator smiling. "If it's to be sent, I have to send it."

"Well, here it is then," said the girl, extending the folded paper which Lieutenant Foray took and unceremoniously opened.

"Oh!" exclaimed Caroline, quickly snatching the paper from his hand, "I didn't tell you you could read it."

Foray stared at her in amazement.

"What do you want me to do with it?"

"I want you to send it."

"Well, how am I going to send it if I don't read it?"

"Do you mean to say that——" began the girl, who had evidently forgotten—if she had ever known—how telegrams were sent.

"I mean to say that I have got to spell out every word on the key. Didn't you know that?"

"Oh, I did, of course—I—but I had forgotten," said Caroline, dismayed by this unexpected development.

"Is there any harm in my reading the message that I have to send?"

"Why I wouldn't have you see it for the world! My gracious!"

"Is it as bad as that, Miss Mitford?" he said laughing.

"Bad! It isn't bad at all, but I wouldn't have it get all over town for anything."

"It will never get out of this office, Miss Mitford," returned Foray composedly. "We are not allowed to mention anything that goes on in here."

"You wouldn't mention it?"

"Certainly not. All sorts of private messages go through here, and——"

"Do they?"

"Every day. Now if that telegram is important——"

"Important, well I should think it was. It is the most important——"

"Then I reckon you had better trust it to me," said Lieutenant Foray.

"Yes," said Caroline, blushing a vivid crimson, "I reckon I had."

She handed him the telegram. He opened it, glanced at it, bit his lips to control his emotion, and then his hands reached for the key.

"Oh, stop!" cried Caroline.

Foray looked at her, his eyes full of amusement, his whole body shaking with suppressed laughter, which she was too wrought-up to perceive.

"Wait till—I—I don't want to be here while you spell out every word—I couldn't stand that."

Caroline had evidently forgotten that the spelling would be in the Morse Code, and that it would be about as intelligible to her as Sanskrit. The Lieutenant humoured her, and waited while Caroline turned toward the door and summoned Martha to her. She did not leave the room, however, for her way was barred by a young private in a grey uniform. The newcomer looked hastily at her and the old negress, stopped by them, and asked them very respectfully to wait a moment. He then approached Foray, who was impatiently waiting until he could send the message. He saluted him and handed him a written order, and then crossed to the other side of the room. A glance put Foray in possession of the contents of this order. He rose to his feet and approached Caroline still standing by the door.

"Miss Mitford," he said.

"Yes."

"I don't understand this, but here is an order that has just come from the Secret Service Department directing me to hold up any despatch you may try to send."

"Hold back my telegram?"

"Yes, Miss Mitford," and Foray looked very embarrassed as he stared again at the order and then from the young girl to the orderly, "and that isn't the worst of it."

"What else is there?" asked the girl, her eyes big with apprehension.

"Why, this man has orders to take back your message with him to the Secret Service Office."

"Take back my message!" cried Caroline.

"There must be some mistake," answered Foray, "but that's what the order says."

"To whom does it say to take it back?" asked the girl, growing more and more indignant.

"To a Mr. Arrelsford."

"Do you mean to tell me that that order is for that man to take my despatch back to Mr. Arrelsford?"

"Yes, Miss Mitford," returned Lieutenant Foray.

"And does it say anything in there about what I am going to do in the meantime?" asked the girl indignantly.

"Nothing."

"Well, that is too bad," returned Caroline ominously.

"I am sorry this has occurred, Miss Mitford," said the Lieutenant earnestly, "but the orders are signed by the head of the Secret Service Department, and you will see that I have no choice——"

"Don't worry about it, Lieutenant Foray," said Caroline calmly, "there is no need of your feeling sorry, because it hasn't occurred, beside that, it is not going to occur. When it does, you can go around being sorry all you like. Have you the faintest idea that I am going to let him take my telegram away with him and show it to the man? Do you suppose——"

She was too indignant to finish her sentence and old Martha valiantly entered the fray.

"No, suh," she cried, in her deepest and most indignant voice. "You all ain't gwine to do it, you kin be right suah you ain't."

"But what can I do?" persisted Foray, greatly distressed.

"You can hand it back to me, that's what you can do."

"Yes, suh, dat's de very best thing you kin do," said old Martha stoutly, "an' de soonah you do it de quickah it'll be done—Ah kin tell you dat right now, suh."

"But this man has come here with orders for me to——" began Foray, endeavouring to explain.

He realised that there was some mistake somewhere. The girl's message had nothing whatever to do with military matters, and he quite understood that she would not want this communication read by every Tom, Dick, or Harry in the Secret Service Department. Beside all this, as she stood before him, her face flushed with emotion, she was a sufficiently pretty, a sufficiently pleading figure to make him most anxious and most willing to help her. In addition, the portly figure of old Martha, whose cheeks doubtless would have been flushed with the same feeling had they not been so black, was more than disconcerting.

"This man," said Caroline, shaking her finger at helpless Private Eddinger, who also found his position most unpleasant, "can go straight back where he came from and report to Mr. Arrelsford that he could not carry out his orders. That's what he can do."

Martha, now thoroughly aroused to a sense of

the rôle she was to play, turned and confronted the abashed private.

"Jes' let him try to tek it. Let him tek it if he wants it so pow'ful bad! Jes let de other one dere gib it to him—an' den see him try an' git out through dis yeah door wid it! Ah wants to see him go by," she said. "Ah'm jes waitin' fur de sight ob him gittin' pas' dis door. Dat's what Ah's waitin' fo'. Ah'd lak to know what dey s'pose it was Ah comed around yeah fo' anyway — dese men wid dese ordahs afussin' an'——"

"Miss Mitford," said Foray earnestly, "if I were to give this despatch back to you it would get me in a heap of trouble."

"What kind of trouble?" asked Caroline dubiously.

"I might be put in prison, I might be shot."

"Do you mean that they would——"

"Sure to do one thing or another."

"Just for giving it back to me when it is my message?"

"Just for that."

"Then you will have to keep it, I suppose," said Caroline faltering.

"Thank you, Miss Mitford."

"Very well," said Caroline, "it is understood. You don't give it back to me, and you can't give it back to him, so nobody's disobeying any orders at all. And that's the way it stands. I reckon I can stay as long as he can. She stepped to a nearby chair and sat down. "I haven't very much to do and probably he has."

"But, Miss Mitford——" began Foray.

"There isn't any good talking any longer. If you have got any telegraphing to do, you had

better do it. I won't disturb you. But don't you give it to him."

Foray stared at her helplessly. What might have resulted, it is impossible to say, for there entered at that opportune moment, Mr. Arrelsford himself, relieving Mr. Foray of the further conduct of the intricate case. His glance took in all the occupants of the room. It was to his own messenger that he first addressed himself.

"Eddinger!"

"Yes, Mr. Arrelsford."

"Didn't you get here in time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why——"

"I beg your pardon," said Foray, "are you Mr. Arrelsford of the Secret Service Department?"

"Yes. Are you holding back a despatch?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why didn't Eddinger bring it to me?"

"Well, you see——" began Foray, hesitating, "Miss Mitford——"

Arrelsford instantly comprehended.

"Eddinger," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Report back to Corporal Matson and tell him to send a surgeon to the prisoner who was wounded at General Varney's house, if he isn't dead by this time. Now let me see that despatch," he continued, as the orderly saluted and ran rapidly from the room.

But again Miss Mitford interposed. She stepped quickly between Arrelsford and Foray, both of whom fell back from her.

"I expect," she said impudently, "that you think you are going to get my telegram and read it?"

"I certainly intend to do so," was the curt answer.

"Well, there's a great disappointment looming up in front of you," returned Caroline defiantly.

"So!" said Arrelsford, with growing suspicion "You have been trying to send out something that you don't want us to see."

"What if I have, sir?"

"Just this," said Arrelsford determinedly. "You won't send it out and I will see it. This is a case——"

"This is a case where nobody is going to read my private writing," persisted Caroline.

The young girl confronted him with blazing eyes and a mien like a small fury. Arrelsford looked at her with ill-concealed yet somewhat vexatious amusement.

"Lieutenant Foray, you have an order to give me that despatch. Bring it to me at once," he said.

Although it was quite evident that Foray greatly disliked the rôle he was compelled to play, his orders were plain, he had no option. He stepped slowly toward the Secret Service Agent, only to be confronted by old Martha, who again interrupted.

"Dat Leftenant kin stay jes whah he is," said the old negress defiantly.

A struggle with her would have been an unseemly spectacle indeed, thought both men.

"Is that Miss Mitford's despatch you have in your hand?" asked Arrelsford.

"Yes, sir."

"Since you can't hand it to me, read it."

Caroline turned to him with a gasp of horror. Martha gave way, and Foray stood surprised.

"Read it out! Don't you hear me?" repeated Arrelsford peremptorily.

"Don't dare to do such a thing," cried Caroline, "you have no right to read a private telegram."

"No, suh! He ain't got no business to read her lettahs, none whatevah!" urged Martha.

"Silence!" roared Arrelsford, his patience at an end. "If either of you interfere any further with the business of this office, I will have you both put under arrest. Read that despatch instantly, Lieutenant Foray."

The game was up so far as the women were concerned. Caroline's head sank on Martha's shoulder and she sobbed passionately, while Lieutenant Foray read the following astonishing and incriminating message.

"'*Forgive me, Wilfred darling, please forgive me and I will help you all I can.*'"

It was harmless, as harmless as it was foolish, that message, but it evidently impressed Mr. Arrelsford as containing some deep, hidden, and sinister meaning.

"That despatch can't go," he said shortly.

"That despatch can go," said Caroline, stopping her sobbing as suddenly as she had begun. "And that despatch will go. I know some one whose orders even you are bound to respect, and some one who will come here with me and see that you do it."

"It may be," answered Arrelsford composedly. "I have a good and sufficient reason——"

"Then you will have to show him, I can tell you that, Mr. Arrelsford."

"I shall be glad to give my reason to my superiors, Miss Mitford, not to you."

"Then you will have to go around giving them to everybody in Richmond, Mr. Arrelsford," said the girl, as she swept petulantly through the door, followed by old Martha, both of whom were very much disturbed by what had occurred.

CHAPTER XII

THORNE TAKES CHARGE OF THE TELEGRAPH OFFICE

ARRELSFORD stared after the departing figures with a mixture of amusement, contempt, and annoyance in his glance. So soon as the door had closed behind them he turned to Lieutenant Foray, who was regarding him with ill-concealed aversion.

"Let me have that despatch," he began in his usual peremptory manner.

"You said you had an order, sir," returned Foray stubbornly.

"Yes, yes," replied the Secret Service Agent impatiently, throwing an order on the table, "there it is, don't waste time."

But Lieutenant Foray was not satisfied, principally because he did not wish to be. He scrutinised the order carefully, and with great distaste at its contents. It was quite evident that if he could have found a possible pretext for refusing obedience, he would gladly have done so. His sympathies were entirely with Miss Mitford.

"I suppose you are Mr. Benton Arrelsford, all right?" he began deliberately, fingering the paper.

"Certainly I am," returned Arrelsford haughtily.

"We have to be very careful nowadays," continued Foray shortly. "But I reckon it's all right. Here's the telegram."

"Did the girl seem nervous or excited when she handed this in?" asked the other, taking the message.

"Do you mean Miss Mitford?" asked Foray reprovingly.

"Certainly, who else?"

"Yes, she did."

"She was anxious not to have it seen by anybody?"

"Anxious, I should say so. She didn't even want me to see it."

"Umph!" said Arrelsford. "I don't mind telling you, Mr. Foray, that we are on the track of a serious affair and I believe she's mixed up in it."

"But that despatch is to young Varney, a mere boy, the General's son," urged the Lieutenant.

"I didn't know he had gone to the front. So much the worse. It's one of the ugliest affairs we have ever had. I had them put me on it, and I have got it pretty close. We have had some checks but we will end it here in this office inside of thirty minutes."

There was a slight tap on the door at this juncture. Arrelsford turned to the door, opened it, and found himself face to face with a soldier, who saluted and stood at attention.

"Well, what is it?"

"The lady's here, sir," said the soldier.

"Where is she?" asked Arrelsford.

"Waiting down below at the front entrance."

"Did she come alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Show her up here at once. I suppose you have a revolver here," continued the Secret Service Man, turning to Lieutenant Foray, who had listened with much interest.

"Certainly," answered Foray, "we are always armed in the telegraph office."

From a drawer in the table he drew forth a revolver which he laid on the top of the table.

"Good," said Arrelsford, "while I want to handle this thing myself, I may call you. Be ready, that's all."

"Very well."

"Obey any orders you may get, and send out all despatches unless I stop you."

"Yes, sir."

"And if you don't mind, I don't care to have all these messenger boys coming back here. I will order them to stop in the hall. If you have any messages for them, you can take them out there. I don't want to have too many people in the room."

"Very good, sir. Will you give the order to your orderly when he brings up the young lady?"

"Yes."

Arrelsford stepped to the door, and Foray busied himself with the clicking instruments. After a few minutes' conversation with the orderly, who had just returned, Arrelsford ushered Edith Varney into the room. With not even a glance at the operator in her intense preoccupation, the girl spoke directly to Arrelsford.

"I—I've accepted your invitation, you see."

"I am greatly obliged to you, Miss Varney," returned Arrelsford with deferential courtesy "As a matter of justice to me, it was——"

"I didn't come to oblige you," answered Edith haughtily.

She had never liked Mr. Arrelsford. His addresses had been most unpleasant and unwelcome to her, and now she not only hated him but she loathed him.

"I came here," she continued, as Arrelsford attempted to speak, "to see that no more——" her voice broke for a moment, "murders are committed here—to satisfy your singular curiosity."

"Murders!" exclaimed Arrelsford, flushing deeply.

The girl nodded.

"The Union soldier who escaped from prison ——" she began.

"Is the man dead?" interrupted Arrelsford.

"The man is dead."

"It is a curious thing, Miss Varney," continued the other with cutting emphasis, "that one Yankee prisoner more or less should make so much difference to you, isn't it? They are dying down in Libby by the hundreds."

"At least they are not being killed in our houses, in our drawing-rooms, before our very eyes?"

She confronted Arrelsford with a bitterly reproachful glance, before which his eyes for a moment fell, and he was glad indeed to turn to another orderly who had just entered the room.

"Have you kept track of him?" he asked in a low voice.

"He's coming down the street to the Department now, sir."

"Where has he been since he left Mrs. Varney's house?"

"He went to his quarters on Cary Street. We got in the next room and watched him through a transom."

"What was he doing?"

"Working on some papers or documents."

"Could you see them? Did you see what they were?"

"They looked like orders from the War Department, sir."

"He is coming here with forged orders, I suppose."

"I don't doubt it, sir."

"I surmise that his game is to get control of these wires and then send out despatches to the front that will take away a battery or a brigade from some vital point. the vital point indicated by 'Plan 3.' That's where they mean to attack to-night."

"Looks like it, sir," agreed the orderly respectfully.

"'Plan 3,' that's where they will hit us," mused the Secret Service Agent; "is there a guard in the building?"

"Not inside, sir," answered the orderly, "there's a guard in front and sentries around the barracks over in the square."

"If I shouted, they could hear from this window, couldn't they?" asked Arrelsford.

"The guard in front could hear you, sir. But the time is getting short. He must be nearly here, you'd better look out, sir."

Edith Varney had heard enough of the conversation to understand that Thorne was coming. Of course it would never do for him to see her there.

"Where am I to go?" she asked.

"Outside here on the balcony," said Arrelsford. "There is no cupboard in the room and it is the only place. I will be with you in a moment."

"But if he should come to the window?"

"We will step in at the other window. Stay, orderly, see if the window of the Commissary General's Office, the next room to the left, is open."

They waited while the orderly went out on the balcony and made his inspection.

"The window of the next room is open, sir," he reported.

"That's all I want of you. Report back to Corporal Matson. Tell him to get the body of the prisoner out of the Varney house. He knows where it's to go."

"Very well, sir."

"Mr. Foray," continued Arrelsford, "whoever comes here you are to keep on with your work and don't give the slightest sign of my presence to any one on any account. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Foray from the telegraph table in the centre of the room.

He had caught something of the conversation, but he was too good a soldier to ask any questions, beside his business was with the telegraph, not with Mr. Arrelsford.

"Now, Miss Varney," said the Secret Service Agent, "this way, please."

He opened the middle window. The girl stepped through, and he was about to follow when he caught sight of a messenger entering the room. Leaving the window, he retraced his steps.

"Where did you come from?" he said abruptly to the young man.

"War Department, sir."

"Carrying despatches?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know me, don't you?"

"I've seen you at the office, sir, and——"

"I'm here on Department business," said Arrelsford. "All you have to do is to keep quiet about it. Weren't you stopped in the hall?"

"Yes, sir, but I had a despatch from the President that had to be delivered to Lieutenant Foray."

"Well, it is just as well," said Arrelsford. "Don't mention having seen me to anybody under any pretext and stay here. You might be needed. On second thoughts, Foray, let any messenger come in."

With that Mr. Arrelsford stepped out on to the balcony through the window which he closed after him, and he and Edith disappeared from view.

"Messenger," said Foray, "step down the hall and tell the private there that by Mr. Arrelsford's orders, messengers are allowed to come up as they report."

The room which had been the scene of these various coloquies became silent save for the continuous clicking of the telegraph keys. Presently two messengers came back and took their positions as before.

Hard on their heels entered Captain Thorne. He was in uniform, of course, and a paper was tucked in his belt. He walked rapidly down the room, acknowledged the salutes of the messengers, and stopped before the table. His quick scrutiny of the room as he advanced had shown him that there was no one present except the messengers

and Lieutenant Foray. Foray glanced up, nodded, finished taking the despatch which was on the wires at the time, wrote it out, put it in its envelope, and then rose to his feet and saluted.

"Captain Thorne," he said.

"Lieutenant Foray," replied Thorne, taking the order from his belt and handing it to the operator.

"Order from the Department?" asked Foray.

"I believe so," answered Thorne briefly.

Lieutenant Foray opened it and read it.

"They want me to take a cipher despatch over to the President's house," he said as he finished.

"Yes," said Thorne, moving to the vacant place at the table. He pulled the chair back a little, tossed his hat on the other table, and otherwise made himself at home.

"I am ordered to stay here until you get back," he began casually, shoving the paper aside and stretching his hand toward the key.

"That's an odd thing, Captain," began Lieutenant Foray dubiously. "I understood that the President was meeting with the Cabinet. In fact, Lieutenant Allison went over there to take some code work a moment ago. He must have gone home, I reckon."

"Looks like it," said Thorne quietly. "If he is not at home you had better wait."

"Yes," said Foray, moving away, "I suppose I had better wait for him. You will have to look out for Allison's wire though on the other table. He was called over to the Department."

"Oh, Allison!" said Thorne carelessly. "Be gone long, do you think?" he continued as he

seated himself at the table and began to arrange the papers.

"Well, you know how it is. They generally whip around quite a while before they make up their minds what they want to do. I don't suppose they will trouble you much. It's as quiet as a church down the river. Good-night."

"See here, Mr. Foray, wait a moment. You had better not walk out and leave—no matter," continued Thorne, as the operator stopped and turned back. "It's none of my business, still if you want some good advice, that is a dangerous thing to do."

"What is it, Captain?" asked Foray, somewhat surprised.

"Leave a cigar lying around an office like that. Somebody might walk in any minute and take it away. I can't watch your cigars all day."

He picked up the cigar, and before Foray could prevent it, lighted it and began to smoke. Foray laughed.

"Help yourself, Captain, and if there is any trouble you will find a revolver on the table."

"I see," said Thorne, "but what makes you think there is going to be trouble?"

"Oh, well there might be."

"Been having a bad dream?" asked the Captain nonchalantly.

"No, but you never can tell. All sorts of things are liable to happen in an office like this, and——"

"That's right," said Thorne, puffing away at his cigar, "you never can tell. But see here. If you never can tell when you are going to have trouble you had better take that gun along with you. I have one of my own."

"Well," said the operator, "if you have one of your own, I might as well."

He took the revolver up and tucked it in his belt. "Look out for yourself, Captain. Good-bye. I will be back as soon as the President gives me that despatch. That despatch I have just finished is for the Commissary General's Office, but it can wait until the morning."

"All right," said Thorne, and the next moment the operator turned away while the clicking of the key called Thorne to the table. It took him but a few minutes to write the brief message which he addressed and turned to the first messenger, "Quartermaster General."

"He wasn't in his office a short time ago, sir," said the messenger.

"Very well, find him. He has probably gone home and he has to have this message."

"Very good, sir."

The key kept up its clicking. In a short time another message was written off.

"Ready here," cried Thorne, looking at the other messenger. "This is for the Secretary of the Treasury, marked private. Take it to his home."

"He was down at the Cabinet meeting a little while ago, sir," said the second messenger.

"No difference, take it to his house and wait until he comes."

The instant the departing messenger left him alone in the room, Thorne leaped to his feet and ran with cat-like swiftness to the door, opened it, and quickly but carefully examined the corridor to make sure that no one was there on duty. Then he closed the door and turned to the nearest window, which he opened also, and looked out

on the balcony, which he saw was empty. He closed the window and came back to the table, unbuckling his belt and coat as he came. These he threw on the table. The coat fell back, and he glanced in the breast pocket to see that a certain document was in sight and at hand, where he could get it quickly. Then he took his revolver, which he had previously slipped from his belt to his hip pocket, and laid it down beside the instrument.

After a final glance around him to see that he was still alone and unobserved, he seized the key on which he sounded a certain call. An expert telegrapher would have recognised it, a dash, four dots in rapid succession, then two dots together, and then two more (— ···· ·· ··). He waited a few moments, and when no answer came he signalled the call a second time, and after another longer wait he sent it a third time.

After this effort he made a longer pause, and just as he had about reached the end of his patience—he was in a fever of anxiety, for upon what happened in the next moment the failure or the success of the whole plan absolutely turned —the silent key clicked out an answer, repeating the same signal which he himself had made. The next moment he made a leap upon the key, but before he could send a single letter steps were heard outside in the corridor.

Thorne released the key, leaned back in his chair, seized a match from the little holder on the table and struck it, and when another messenger entered he seemed to be lazily lighting his cigar. He cursed in his heart at the inopportune arrival. Another uninterrupted moment and he would have sent the order, but as usual he gave

no outward evidence of his extreme annoyance. The messenger came rapidly down toward the table and handed Captain Thorne a message.

"From the Secretary of War, Captain Thorne," he said saluting, "and he wants it to go out right away."

"Here, here," said Thorne, as the messenger turned away, "what's all this?" He ran his fingers through the envelope, tore it open, and spread out the despatch. "Is that the Secretary's signature?" he asked.

The messenger came back.

"Yes, sir; I saw him sign it myself. I'm his personal messenger."

"Oh!" said Thorne, spreading the despatch out on the table and O.K.'ing it, "you saw him sign it yourself, did you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. We have to be pretty careful to-night," he explained, "there is something on. You are sure of this, are you?"

"I could swear to that signature anywhere, sir," said the messenger.

"Very well," said Thorne, "you may go."

CHAPTER XIII

THE TABLES ARE TURNED

As soon as the door was closed behind the messenger Thorne laid his cigar down on the table. Then he picked up the despatch from the Secretary of War which the messenger had just brought in, and folded it very dexterously. Then with a pair of scissors which he found in a drawer he cut off the lower part of the Secretary's despatch containing his signature. He put this between his teeth and tore the rest into pieces. He started to throw the pieces into the waste basket but after a moment's reflection he stuffed them into his trouser pocket. Then he picked up his coat from the back of the chair and took from the inside breast pocket another document written on the same paper as that which had just come from the Secretary of War. Spreading this out on the table he cut off the signature and quickly pasted to it the piece of the real order bearing the real signature. He carefully wiped this pasted despatch with his handkerchief, making an exceedingly neat job of it.

As he did so, he smiled slightly. Fortune, which had dealt him so many rebuffs had evened up matters a little by giving him this opportunity. He had now in his possession a despatch bearing the genuine signature of the Secretary of

War. Even if he were interrupted the chances were he would still be able to send it. So soon as he had doctored the despatch, he sat down at the instrument and once more essayed to send the message.

Now during all this rapid bit of manipulation Thorne had been under close observation, for Arrelsford and Edith Varney had come from the Commissary General's Office, where they had concealed themselves while Thorne examined the porch, and had stepped back to the nearest window and were intently watching. Fortunately, his back partially concealed his action and the watchers could not tell exactly what he had done, although it was quite evident that he was in some way altering some kind of a despatch.

Just as Thorne began to send the message, Arrelsford accidentally struck the window with his elbow making a slight sound. The instant he did so, he and the girl vanished from sight. Once again Thorne released the key, and his hand moved quietly but rapidly from the instrument to the revolver. The instant it was in his hand he sprang to his feet, whirled about, leaped to the gas bracket and turned off the light. The room was left in darkness, save for the faint illumination of the moonlight through the windows.

Immediately he turned off the light he ran to the doors leading into the hall. They were provided with heavy old-fashioned bolts which he shot swiftly, locking them on the inside. Then with the utmost caution he edged around the wall until he came to the first window. He waited with his left hand on the catch of the window, and with his right advanced his revolver.

After a moment's pause he threw it open quickly and stepped out on the balcony. It was empty as before.

He must have made a mistake, he thought, since no one was there, and he blamed the whole incident to his over-agitated nerves. Indeed what he had gone through in the preceding two hours would have shaken any man's nerves, might have broken most men's. He was annoyed at having wasted precious time, and turned to the table again, stopping on his way to relight the light.

Once more he seized the key. He could telegraph equally well with either hand. He did not lay down his revolver on the table this time, but kept it in his right hand while the fingers of his left hand touched the button. He had scarcely made a dot or a dash when there was a sudden flash of light and the sound of an explosion, that of a heavy revolver, mingled with the crash of shattered glass. Captain Thorne's fingers fell from the key and a jet of blood spurted out upon the table and the papers.

He rose to his feet with incredible swiftness, his revolver in his right hand, only to be confronted by Arrelsford at the front window. The latter held in his hand, pointed fairly and squarely at Thorne, the heavy service revolver with which he had just shot him in the left wrist. Thorne made a swift motion with his right hand but Arrelsford was too quick for him.

"Drop that gun!" he shouted. "Drop it quick, or you are a dead man!"

There was no possibility of disobedience. Thorne straightened up and laid his revolver on the table. The two confronted each other,

and if looks could have killed they had both been dead men. The soldier shrugged his shoulders at last, took his handkerchief out of his pocket, put one end of it between his teeth, and with the other hand wrapped it tightly around his wounded wrist.

The civilian meantime advanced toward him, keeping him covered all the time with his revolver.

"Do you know why I didn't kill you like the dog you are, just now?" he asked truculently, as he drew nearer.

"Because you are such a damned bad shot, I suppose," coolly answered Thorne between his teeth, still tying the bandage, after which he calmly picked up his cigar and began smoking again with the utmost indifference.

Whatever fate had in store for him could better be met, he thought swiftly at this juncture, provided he kept his temper, and so he spoke as nonchalantly as before. Indeed his manner had always been most irritating and exasperating to Arrelsford.

"Maybe you will change your mind about that later on," the latter rejoined.

"Well, I hope so," said Thorne, completing his bandage and tying the knot so as to leave the fingers of his left hand free. "You see, it isn't pleasant to be riddled in this way."

"Next time you'll be riddled somewhere else beside the wrist. There's only one reason why you are not lying there now with a bullet through your head."

"Only one?" queried Thorne.

"Only one."

"Do I hear it?"

"You do. I gave my word of honour to some one outside that I wouldn't kill you, and——"

"Oh, then this isn't a little tête-à-tête just between ourselves. You have some one with you?" asked Thorne, interested greatly in this new development, wondering who the some one was who had interfered in his behalf. Perhaps that evident friendship might be turned to account later on. For a moment not an idea of who was there entered Thorne's mind.

"Yes, I have some one with me, Captain Thorne, who takes quite an interest in what you are doing to-night," returned Arrelsford sneeringly.

"That is very kind, I am sure. Is the—er—gentleman going to stay out there all alone on the balcony, or shall I have the pleasure of inviting him in here and having a charming little three-handed——"

The third party answered the question, for Edith Varney came through the window with the shattered pane through which Arrelsford had fired and entered. Thorne was shocked beyond measure by her arrival, not the slightest suspicion that she could have been there had crossed his mind. So she had been an eye witness to his treachery. He had faced Arrelsford's pistol with the utmost composure, there was something in Edith Varney's look that cut him to the heart, yet she did not look at him either. Oh the contrary, she carefully avoided his glance. Instead she turned to Arrelsford.

"I think I will go, Mr. Arrelsford," she said in a low, choked voice.

"Not yet, Miss Varney," he said peremptorily.

The girl gave him no heed. She turned and walked blindly toward the door.

"I don't wish to stay here any longer," she faltered.

"One moment, please," said Arrelsford, as she stopped, "we need you."

"For what?"

"As a witness."

"You can send for me if you need me, I will be at home."

"I am sorry," said Arrelsford, again interposing, "I will have to detain you until I turn him over to the guard. It won't take long."

The middle window was open and he stepped to it, still keeping an eye on Thorne, and shouted at the top of his voice:

"Call the guard! Corporal of the Guard! Send up the guard to the telegraph office!"

The note of triumph in his voice was unmistakable. From the street the three inside heard a faint cry:

"What's the matter? Who calls the guard?"

"Up here in the telegraph office," said Arrelsford, "send them up quick."

The answer was evidently sufficient, for they could hear the orders and the tumult in the square below.

"Corporal of the Guard, Post Four! Fall in the guard! Fall in! Lively, men!" and so on.

The game appeared to be up this time. Mr. Arrelsford held all the winning cards, thought Thorne, and he was playing them skilfully. He ground his teeth at the thought that another moment and the order would have been sent probably beyond recall. Fate had played him a scurvy trick, it had thwarted him at the last

move, and Arrelsford had so contrived that his treachery had been before the woman he loved. Under other circumstances the wound in his wrist would have given him exquisite pain, as it was he scarcely realised at the time that he had been hurt.

Arrelsford still stood by the window, glancing out on the square but keeping Thorne under close observation. The evil look in his eyes and the malicious sneer on his lips well seconded the expression of triumph in his face. He had the man he hated where he wanted him. It was a splendid piece of work that he had performed, and in the performance he sated his private vengeance and carried out his public duty.

On his part, Thorne was absolutely helpless. There was that in the bearing of the woman he loved that prevented him from approaching her. He shot a mute look of appeal to her which she received with marble face, apparently absolutely indifferent to his presence, yet she was suffering scarcely less than he. In her anguish she turned desperately to Arrelsford.

"I am not going to stay," she said decisively, "I don't wish to be a witness."

"Whatever your feelings may be, Miss Varney," persisted Arrelsford, "I can't permit you to refuse."

"If you won't take me downstairs, I will find the way myself," returned the girl as if she had not heard.

She turned resolutely toward the door. Before she reached it the heavy tramping of the guard was heard.

"Too late," said Arrelsford triumphantly, "you can't go now, the guard is here."

Edith could hear the approaching soldiers as well as anybody. The way was barred, she realised instantly. Well, if she could not escape, at least she could get out of sight. She turned and opened the nearest window and stepped out. Arrelsford knew that she could not go far, and that he could produce her whenever he wanted her. He made no objection to her departure that way, therefore. Instead he looked at Thorne.

"I have you just where I want you at last," he said mockingly, as the trampling feet came nearer. "You thought you were mighty smart, but you will find that I can match your trick every time."

Outside in the hall the men came to a sudden halt before the door. One of them knocked loudly upon it.

"What's the matter here?" cried the Sergeant of the Guard without.

The handle was tried and the door was shoved violently, but the brass bolt held.

"Let us in!" he cried angrily.

Quick as a flash of lightning an idea came to Thorne.

"Sergeant!" he shouted in a powerful voice. "Sergeant of the Guard!"

"Sir!"

"Break down the door! Break it down with your musket butts!"

As the butts of the muskets pounded against the heavy mahogany panels, Arrelsford cried out in great surprise:

"What did you say?"

In his astonishment, he did not notice a swift movement Thorne made toward the door.

"You want them in, don't you?" the soldier

said, as he approached the door. "It is locked and——"

But Arrelsford recovered himself a little and again presented his revolver.

"Stand where you are," he cried, but Thorne by this time had reached the door.

"Smash it down, Sergeant!" he cried. "What are you waiting for? Batter it down!"

The next moment the door gave way with a crash, and into the room poured the guard. The grizzled old Sergeant had scarcely stepped inside the room when Thorne shouted in tones of the fiercest authority, pointing at Arrelsford:

"Arrest that man!"

Before the dazed Secret Service Agent could say a word or press the trigger the soldiers were upon him.

"He got in here with a revolver," continued Thorne more quietly, "and is playing hell with it. Hold him fast!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE CALL OF THE KEY

This astonishing dénouement fairly paralysed Arrelsford. With a daring and ability for which he had not given Thorne credit, and which was totally unexpected, although what he had learned of his previous career might have given him some warning, the tables had been turned upon him by a man whom he confidently fancied he had entrapped beyond possibility of escape!

His amazement held him speechless for a moment, but his natural resourcefulness came back to him with his returning presence of mind. He knew the futility of an attempt to struggle with his captors, he therefore decided to try to reason with them.

"Sergeant," he began, quietly enough, "my orders are——"

But Thorne would not let him continue. Having gained the advantage he was determined to keep it to the end, and for that purpose he followed up his first blow, ruthlessly pressing his charge hard.

"Damn your orders!" he interrupted furiously. "You haven't got orders to shoot everybody you see in this office, have you?"

This was too much for Arrelsford, and he made a desperate plunge forward to get at Thorne, who

shook his wounded wrist in the Secret Service Agent's face. The soldiers held him tightly, however, and Thorne continued hotly :

"Get his gun away, Sergeant; he'll hurt somebody."

While the soldiers—who appeared to entertain no doubt and to have no hesitancy whatever about obeying Thorne's orders, the latter evidently the military man of the two and his voice and bearing, to say nothing of his uniform, telling heavily against a civilian like Arrelsford—were taking the revolver out of his hands, Thorne once more turned to the telegraph-table. His blood was up and he would send the despatch now before the whole assemblage, before the Confederate Government or its Army, if necessary.

Arrelsford burst out in a last vain attempt to stop him :

"Listen to me, Sergeant," he pleaded desperately, "he is going to send out a false telegram and——"

"That'll do," gruffly said the Sergeant of the Guard, shaking his fist in Arrelsford's face, "what is it all about, Captain ? "

"All about ? I haven't the slightest idea. He says he comes from some office or other. I was sending off some important official despatches here and he began by letting off his gun at me. Crazy lunatic, I think."

"It's a lie ! " said Arrelsford furiously. "Let me speak—I will—prove——"

"Here ! " said the Sergeant of the Guard, "that'll do now. What shall I do with him, Captain ? "

"I don't care a damn what you do with him. Get him out of here, that's all I want."

"Very well, sir. Are you much hurt?"

"Oh, no. He did up one hand, but I can get along with the other all right," said Thorne, sitting down at the table and seizing the key.

"Stop him!" cried Arrelsford, fully divining that Thorne intended to send the message. "He's sending a—wait!" A thought came to him. "Ask Miss Varney, she saw him,—ask Miss Varney."

But the old Sergeant of the Guard paid no attention whatever to his frantic appeals.

"Here, fall in there!" he said. "We'll get him out, Captain. Have you got him, men? Forward then!"

Struggling furiously the squad of soldiers forced Arrelsford to the door. Thorne paid absolutely no attention to them; he had forgotten their presence. Like his attention, his mind and heart were on the key again. But he was fated to meet with still another interruption.

"Halt there!" cried a sharp voice from the hall, just as the group reached the door.

"Halt! Left Face!" cried the Sergeant in turn, recognising that here was a superior whom it were well to obey without question or hesitation.

"Here is General Randolph," said the voice outside, giving the name of one of the high officers of the Richmond Garrison.

"Present arms!" cried the Sergeant of the Guard as General Randolph appeared in the doorway.

Following him were some officers of his staff and by his side was the imposing figure of Miss Caroline Mitford. The humiliation and indignation had vanished from her bearing which was one of unmitigated triumph. She threw a glance

at Arrelsford which bode ill for that young man. The General entered the room and stopped before the Secret Service Agent, who stood in front of the guard, although he had been released by the men.

"What's all this about?" he asked peremptorily.

Although he knew that something important was transpiring, and that the newcomer was a man of rank, Thorne never turned his head. At whatever cost, he realised he must get the telegram off, and from the look of things it appeared that his only chance was then and there. He did not care if the President of the Confederate States of America were there in person, his mind and soul were on the order. He was frantically calling the station he wanted, the one indicated by "Plan 3," and he had the doctored despatch, to which he had pasted the Secretary's signature, spread out on the table before him.

"What's all this about refusing to send out Miss Mitford's telegram?" began General Randolph peremptorily. "Some of your work, I understand, Mr. Arrelsford."

"General!" cried Arrelsford breathlessly. "They have arrested me. It is a conspiracy——" He turned toward Thorne. "Stop that man, for God's sake stop him before it's too late!"

At this juncture, Caroline Mitford turned from the room and joined old Martha in the hall, and disappeared. She had only come back with the General to punish Arrelsford, but she did not care to have her precious despatch made the subject of discussion before so many people.

"Stop him!" exclaimed the General. "What do you mean?"

It was evident that the despatch was not to go out then. Thorne had not succeeded in getting an answer to his signal. He left the key, rose, and saluted.

"He means me, sir," he said. "He's got an idea some despatch I'm sending out is a trick of the Yankees."

"It is a conspiracy!" cried Arrelsford. "He is an impostor——"

"Why, the man must have gone crazy, General," said Thorne coolly, holding his position by the table and listening with all his ears for the return signal.

"I came here on a case for——" expostulated Arrelsford.

"Wait!" said General Randolph. "I will soon get at the bottom of this. What was he doing when you came in, Sergeant?" he asked of the non-commissioned officer in charge of the guard.

"He was firing on the Captain, sir," answered the Sergeant saluting.

"He was sending out a false order to weaken our lines at Cemetery Hill, and I—ah—Miss Varney, she was here. She saw it all," explained Arrelsford.

"Miss Varney!" exclaimed the General.

"Yes, sir."

"The General's daughter?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what was she doing here?"

"She came to see for herself whether this man was guilty or not; whether he was a spy or a traitor."

"Is this some personal matter of yours, Mr. Arrelsford?" asked the General suspiciously.

"He was a visitor at her house and I wanted her to know."

"Where is she now? Where is Miss Varney?" asked Randolph impatiently.

"She must be out there on the balcony," answered Arrelsford. "I beg you to send for her, sir."

"Sergeant," said General Randolph, "step out on the balcony. Present my compliments to Miss Varney, and ask her to come in at once."

In a moment the Sergeant returned.

"There is no one there, sir," he replied saluting.

At that instant Thorne got the long desired signal. Without a moment's hesitation, he turned to the key. He picked up the despatch with his wounded left hand and with the other began to manipulate the sounder,

"She must be there," said Arrelsford, "or else she's stepped into the next room, the Commissary General's Office, the window was open, tell him to—ah!" as the sound of the clicking caught his ear, "Stop him! He is sending it now!"

Mr. Arrelsford's distress was so overwhelming and so genuine that something of the man's suspicion was communicated to the General.

"One moment, Captain," he said.

Captain Thorne, of course, had no option but to release the key. He stopped sending and dropped the despatch, saluting.

"Now, Mr. Arrelsford," said the General, "what have you to do with the Military Telegraph Department?"

"This is a Secret Service case; they assigned it to me, sir."

"What is a Secret Service case?"

"The whole plot to send the order. It's the Yankee Secret Service. He is a member of it and his brother brought in the signal to-night."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Thorne, "this despatch ought to go out at once, sir. It came from the Secretary of War and it is very urgent."

"Go ahead with it," said General Randolph.

Thorne needed no further permission than that, dropped to his seat, and once more seized the fatal key.

"No, no!" cried Arrelsford. "Don t let him —I tell you it's a——"

"Silence, sir," thundered Randolph.

"Do you know what he is telling them?" persisted Arrelsford.

"No, do you?"

"Yes," returned the Secret Service Agent.

"Wait a moment, Captain Thorne," said the General, impressed in spite of himself by this man's earnestness, which made him disregard all orders, commands, and everything else. "Where is the despatch?"

Captain Thorne picked up the paper and handed it to the General, and then stepped back. He had played his last card. He played it desperately, boldly, and well.

"Well?" asked the General, looking from the despatch to the accuser, "what has he been telling them?"

"He began to give an order to withdraw Marston's Division from its present position," said Arrelsford, making a brilliant and successful guess at the probable point of attack in "Plan 3."

"That is perfectly correct," said General Randolph, looking at the paper.

"Yes, by that despatch, but that despatch is

a forgery. It is an order to withdraw a whole division from a vital point. A false order, he wrote it himself. This is the turning point of the whole plot."

"But why should he write it himself? If he wanted to send a false order, he could send it without putting it down on paper, couldn't he?"

"Yes," admitted Arrelsford, but he went on with great acuteness, "if any of the operators came back they would catch him doing it. With that order and the Secretary's signature he could go right on. He could even order one of them to send it."

"And pray how did he get the Secretary's signature to a forged telegram?" asked General Randolph.

"He tore it off a genuine despatch. Why, General, look at that despatch in your hand yourself. The Secretary's signature is pasted on, I saw him do it."

"They often come that way, sir," said Thorne nonchalantly.

"He is a liar!" cried Arrelsford. "They never do!"

Thorne stepped forward impulsively, his face flushed at the word "liar," but he controlled himself.

"General," he said, "if you have any doubt about that despatch, send it back to the War Office and have it verified."

It was a splendid, magnificent bluff. So overwhelming in its assurance that even Arrelsford himself was petrified with astonishment. He was morally certain that Thorne was a Federal Secret Service Agent and that the despatch was a forgery, yet it would take but a few minutes to send it

over to the Secretary's office and convict him out of his own mouth. What could the man mean!

"That's a good idea," said General Randolph. He hesitated a moment and then turned to the guard. "Sergeant," he said, "take this despatch over to the Secretary's office and——"

At that moment, the key which had been silent began a lively clicking. General Randolph turned toward it, and Thorne made a quick step in the same direction.

"What's that?" asked the General.

Thorne stood by the desk listening while the key clicked out the message.

"Adjutant General Chesney," he spelt out slowly.

"Oh, from the front, then?" said Randolph.

"Yes, sir," answered Thorne.

"What is he saying?"

Thorne stepped to the table and bent over the clicking key. "His compliments, sir," he read off slowly. "He asks"—waiting for a few minutes—"for the rest,"—still another pause—"of that despatch—he says it's of vital importance, sir, and——"

The communication which Thorne had made to General Randolph was in itself of vital importance. The General was too good a soldier not to know the danger of delay in the carrying out of a military manœuvre which was probably part of some general plan of attack or defence to which he was not privy. He made up his mind instantly. He took the despatch from the hand of the Sergeant and turned it over to Thorne again.

"Let him have it," he said decisively.

The Captain with his heart pounding like mad sat down at the table and seized the key. Was he going to complete the despatch? Was the plan to be carried out? Had he triumphed in the bold and desperately played game by his splendid courage, resourcefulness, and assurance? His eyes shone, the colour came back into his pale cheeks as his hands trembled on the key.

"General!" cried Arrelsford, "if you——"

"That's enough, sir. We will have you examined at headquarters."

At that instant Lieutenant Foray came rapidly into the room.

"Thank God!" cried Arrelsford, as he caught sight of him. "There's a witness, he was sent away on a forged order, ask him?"

Another interruption, thought Thorne, desperately fingering the keys. If they would only give him a minute more he could complete the order, but he was not to have that minute apparently.

"Wait, Captain," said General Randolph quickly, and again the key was silent. "Now, sir," he said to Lieutenant Foray, "where did you come from?"

The Lieutenant did not at all comprehend what was toward, but his answer to that question was plain.

"There was some mistake, sir," he answered saluting.

"Ah!" cried Arrelsford, a note of triumph in his voice.

"Who made it?" asked the General.

"I got an order to go to the President's house," returned Foray, "and when I got there the President——"

Thorne made one last attempt to complete his message.

"Beg pardon, General, this delay will be most disastrous. Permit me to go on with this message. If there's any mistake, we can rectify it afterward."

He seized the key and continued sending the message as he spoke.

"No!" cried Arrelsford.

General Randolph either did not hear Thorne's speech or heed it, or else he did not care to prevent him, and he continued his questioning.

"Where did you get this mistaken order?" he asked.

But Arrelsford, intensely alive to what was going on, interposed.

"He's at it again, sir!"

"Halt, there!" said General Randolph. "I ordered you to wait."

The despatch was almost completed. Thorne ground his teeth with rage in his impatience. He had tried audacity before, he would try it again.

"I was sent here to attend to the business of this office and that business is going out," he said resolutely.

"No," said General Randolph with equal firmness, "it is not going out until I am ready for it."

"My orders come from the War Department, not from you, sir. This despatch came in half an hour ago," answered Thorne angrily, his voice rising, "they are calling for it at the other end of the line. It's my business to send it out and I am going to do it."

"Stop!" said General Randolph, as Thorne began to send the message again. "Sergeant, seize that man and keep him from that machine."

Well, the last hope was gone. As the Sergeant stepped forward to execute his orders, Thorne, desperately determined to the last, clicked out a letter, but he was cut short in the middle of a word. The Sergeant and two men dragged him away, chair and all, from the table, and two others posted themselves in front of the key.

"I will have you court-martialled for this, sir," said General Randolph angrily.

"You will have to answer yourself," cried Thorne, playing the game to the last, "for the delay of a despatch of vital importance, sent by the Secretary of War."

"Do you mean that?" cried Randolph.

"I mean just that," answered Thorne, "and I demand that you let me proceed with the business of this office. Before these officers and men I repeat that demand."

"By what authority do you send that despatch?"

"I refer you to the Department, sir."

"Show me your orders for taking charge of this office."

"I refer you to the Department, sir," answered Thorne stubbornly.

"By God, sir!" continued General Randolph hotly. "I will refer to the Department. Leave your men on guard there, Sergeant. Go over to the War Office. My compliments to the Secretary of War, and ask him if he will be so good as to——"

But Arrelsford's evil genius prompted him to interpose again. When affairs were going to his liking he should have let them alone, but fate seemed to be playing into his hand, and he determined to make the most of it and the chance.

"Another witness! Miss Varney," he cried triumphantly, as he bowed toward the window in which Edith had at that moment appeared. "She was here with me, she saw it all. Ask her."

General Randolph turned toward the window and in his turn bowed to the girl.

"Miss Varney," he asked courteously, "do you know anything about this?"

"About what, sir?" answered Edith in a low voice.

"Mr. Arrelsford claims that Captain Thorne is acting without authority in this office and that you can testify to that effect," was the General's answer.

CHAPTER XV

LOVE AND DUTY AT THE TOUCH

THORNE'S case was now absolutely hopeless. By the testimony of two witnesses a thing is established. All that Arrelsford had seen Edith had seen. All that he knew, she knew. She had only to speak and the plan had failed; the cleverly constructed scheme would fall to pieces. His brother's life would have been wasted, nay more, his own life also; for well did he realise that the bold way he had played the game would the more certainly hasten his immediate execution. A spy in the Confederate capital!

He could reproach himself with nothing. He had done his very best. An ordinary man would have failed a dozen times in the struggle. Courage, adroitness, resourcefulness, and good fortune had carried him so far, but the odds were now heavily against him and nothing that he could do would avail him anything. The game was played and he had lost; Arrelsford had triumphed.

Thorne, in the one word that Edith Varney was to speak, would lose life, honour, and that for which he had risked both. And he would lose more than that. He would lose the love of the woman who had never seemed so beautiful to him as she stood there, pale-faced, erect, the very incarnation of self-sacrifice, as were all the

women of the Confederacy. And he would lose more than her love. He would lose her respect. His humiliation would be her humiliation. Never so long as she lived could her mind dwell on him with tenderness. The sound of his name would be a hissing and a reproach in her ear, his reputation a by-word and a shame. Her connection with him and that he had loved her would humiliate her only less than the fact that she had loved him.

His condition was indeed pitiable; yet, to do him justice, his thoughts were not so much for himself as they were for two other things. First and foremost bulked largest before him the plan for which he had made all this sacrifice, which had promised to end the weary months of siege which Richmond and Petersburg had sustained. His brother had lost his life, he more than suspected, in the endeavour to carry it out, and now he had failed. That was a natural humiliation and reproach to his pride, although as his mind went back over the scene he could detect no false move on his part. Of course his allowing his love for Edith Varney to get the mastery of him had been wrong under the circumstances, but that had not affected the failure or success of his endeavours.

And his thoughts also were for the woman. He knew that she loved him, he had admitted it, but once his eyes had been opened, he could have told it without any admission at all. All that he had suffered, she had suffered, and more. If she would be compelled to apologise for him, she would also be compelled to assume the defensive for him. She loved him and she was placed in the fearful position of having to deal

the blow. The words which would presently fall from her lips would complete his undoing. They would blast his reputation forever and send him to his death. He knew they would not be easy words for her to speak. He knew that what ever his merit or demerit, she would never forget that it was she who had completed his ruin ; the fact that she would also ruin the plan against her country would not weigh very heavily in her breaking heart against that present personal consideration—after a while maybe but not at first. And therefore he pitied her.

He drew himself erect to meet his fate like a man, and waited. The wait was a long one. Edith Varney was having her own troubles. She knew as well as any one the importance of her testimony. She had come from the Commissary General's vacant office and had been back at the window long enough to have heard the conversation between General Randolph and the two men. She was an unusually keen-witted girl and she realised the situation to the full.

Her confidence in her lover had been shaken, undermined, restored, and shaken again, until her mind was in a perfect whirl. She did not know, she could not tell whether he was what he seemed to be or not. It seemed like treachery to him, this uncertainty. It would be a simple matter to corroborate Mr. Arrelsford at once, and it occurred to her that she had no option. But coincident with the question flashed into her mind something she had forgotten which made it possible for her to answer in another way. Thus, she understood that the life of her lover hung upon her decision.

What answer should she make ? What course

should she take? She realised, too, that it was quite possible if she saved his life, it might result in the carrying out of the plan about which there had been so much discussion and which threatened so much against her country. If he were false and she saved him he would certainly take advantage of the respite. If he were true and she saved him no harm could come to her country. She was intensely patriotic. And that phase of the problem worried her greatly.

Her eyes flashed quickly from the vindictive yet triumphant face of Arrelsford, whom she loathed, to the pale, composed, set face of Thorne, whom she loved, and her glance fell upon his wounded left wrist, tied up, the blood oozing through the handkerchief. A wave of sympathy and tenderness filled her breast. He was hurt, suffering—that decided her.

With one brief, voiceless prayer to God for guidance, she turned to General Randolph, and it was well that she spoke when she did, for the pause had become insupportable to Thorne at least. He had made up his mind to relieve the dilemma and confess his guilt so that the girl would not have to reproach herself with a betrayal of her lover or her cause, that she might not feel that she had been found wanting at the crucial moment. Indeed, Thorne would have done this before but his duty as a soldier enjoined upon him the propriety, the imperative necessity, of playing the game to the very end. The battle was not yet over. It would never be over until he faced the firing party.

And then Edith's voice broke the silence that had become so tense with emotion.

"Mr. Arrelsford is mistaken, General Ran-

dolph," she said quietly, "Captain Thorne has the highest authority in this office."

Arrelsford started violently and opened his mouth to speak, but General Randolph silenced him with a look. The blood of the old general was up, and it had become impossible for any one to presume in the least degree. Thorne started, too. The blood rushed to his heart. He thought he would choke to death. What did the girl mean?

"The highest authority, sir," continued Edith Varney, slowly drawing out the commission, which every one but she had forgotten in the excitement, "the authority of the President of the Confederate States of America."

Well, she had done it for weal or for woe. She had made her decision. Had it been a wise decision? Had she acted for the best? What interest had governed her, love for Thorne, love for her country, or love for her own peace of mind? It was in the hands of General Randolph now. The girl turned slowly away, unable to sustain the burning glances of her lover and the vindictive stare of Arrelsford.

"What's this?" said General Randolph. "Umph! A Major's Commission. In command of the Telegraph Department. Major Thorne, I congratulate you."

"That commission, General Randolph!" exclaimed Arrelsford, his voice rising, "let me explain how she——"

"That will do from you, sir," said the General, "you have made enough trouble as it is. I suppose you claim that this is a forgery, too——"

"Let me tell you, sir," persisted the Secret Service Agent.

"You have told me enough as it is. Sergeant, take him over to headquarters."

"Fall in there!" cried the Sergeant of the Guard. "Two of you take the prisoner. Forward, march!"

Two men seized Arrelsford, and the rest of them closed about him. To do the man justice, he made a violent struggle, and was only marched out at the point of the bayonet, protesting and crying:

"For God's sake, he's in the Yankee Secret Service! He'll send that despatch out. His brother brought in the signal to-night!"

All the way down the corridor he could be heard yelling and struggling. General Randolph paid not the slightest attention to him. He stepped over to the telegraph table beside which Thorne stood—and with all the force of which he was capable the young man could hardly control the trembling of his knees.

"Major Thorne," he said reprovingly as Thorne saluted him, "all this delay has been your own fault. If you had only had sense enough to mention this before we would have been saved a damned lot of trouble. There's your commission, sir." He handed it to Thorne, who saluted him again as one in a dream. "Come, gentlemen," he said to his officers, "I can't understand why they have to be so cursed shy about their Secret Service orders! Lieutenant Foray?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take your orders from Major Thorne."

"Yes, sir," returned Foray.

"Good-night," said the General, forgetful of the fact apparently that Edith Varney was still standing by the window.

"Good-night, sir," answered Thorne.

Foray moved over to the table at the right, while Thorne leaped to his former position, and his hand sought the key. At last he could send his message, there was nothing to prevent him or interrupt him now, he was in command. Could he get it through? For a moment he forgot everything but that, as he clicked out the call again, but he had scarcely pressed the button when Edith Varney stepped to his side.

"Captain Thorne," she said in a low voice, giving him the old title.

He looked up at her, stopping a moment.

"What I have done gives you time to escape from Richmond," she continued.

"Escape!" whispered Thorne, clicking the key again. "Impossible!"

"Oh," said the girl, laying her hand on his arm, "you wouldn't do it—now!"

And again the man's fingers remained poised over the key as he stared at her.

"I gave it to you to—to save your life. I didn't think you'd use it for anything else. Oh! You wouldn't!"

Her voice in its low whisper was agonising. If her face had been white before, what could be said of it now? In a flash Thorne saw all. She had been confident of his guilt, and she had sought to save his life because she loved him, and now because she loved her country she sought to save that too.

The call sounded from the table. Thorne turned to it, bent over it, and listened. It was the call for the message. Then he turned to the woman. She looked at him; just one look. The kind of a look that Christ might have turned

upon Peter after those denials when He saw him in the courtyard early on that bitter morning of betrayal. "I saved you," the girl's look seemed to say, "I redeemed you and now you betray me!" She spoke no words, words were useless between them. Everything had been said, everything had been done. She could only go. Never woman looked at man nor man looked at woman as these two at each other.

The woman turned, she could trust herself no further. She went blindly toward the door. The man followed her slowly, crushing the commission in his hand, and ever as he went he heard the sound of the call behind him. He stopped halfway between the door and the table and watched her go, and then he turned.

Lieutenant Foray understanding nothing of what had transpired, but hearing the call, had taken Thorne's place before the table. He had the despatch about which there had been so much trouble, and upon which the whole plan turned, in his hand before him.

"They are calling for that despatch, sir," he said as Thorne stared at him in agony. "What shall I do with it?"

"Send it," said the other hoarsely.

"Very good, sir," answered Foray, seating himself and taking hold of the key, but the first click of the sounder awakened Thorne to action.

"No, no!" he cried. "Stop!" He rushed forward and seized the despatch. "I won't do it!" he thundered. With his wounded hand and his well one he tore the despatch into fragments. "Revoke the order. Tell them it was a mistake instantly. I refuse to act under this commission!"

BOOK IV

WHAT HAPPENED AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK

CHAPTER XVI

THE TUMULT IN HUMAN HEARTS

Of the many frightful nights in Richmond during the siege, that night was one of the worst. The comparative calmness of the earlier hours of repose of the quiet April evening gave way to pandemonium. The works at Petersburg, desperately held by the Confederates, were miles away from the city to the southward, but such was the tremendous nature of the cannonading that the shocking sounds seemed to be close at hand. Children cowered, women shuddered, and old men prayed as they thought of the furious onslaughts in the battle raging.

The Richmond streets were filled with people, mostly invalids, non-combatants, women, and children. A tremendous attack was being launched by the besiegers somewhere, it was evident. Urgent messengers from General Lee called every reserve out of the garrison at Richmond, and the quiet streets and country highways awoke instantly to life. Such troops as could be spared moved to the front at the double-quick. Every car of the dilapidated railroad was pressed into service. Those who could not be transported by train went on horseback or afoot. The youngest boy and the oldest man alike shouldered their muskets, and with motley

clothes, but with hearts aflame, marched to the sound of the cannon. The women, the sick, the wounded and invalid men and the children waited.

Morning would tell the tale. Into the city from which they marched, men and boys would come back ; an army nearly as great as had gone forth, but an army halting, maimed, helpless, wounded, suffering, shot to pieces. They had seen it too often not to be able to forecast the scene absolutely. They knew with what heroic determination their veterans, under the great Lee, were fighting back the terrific attacks of their brothers in blue, under the grimly determined Grant. They could hear his great war-hammer ringing on their anvil ; a hammer of men, an anvil of men. Plan or no plan, success or no success of some Secret Service operations, some vital point was being wrestled for in a death-grapple between two armies ; and all the offensive capacities of the one and all the defensive resources of the other were meeting, as they had been meeting during the long years.

In a time like that, of public peril and public need, private and personal affairs ought to be forgotten, but it was not so. Love and hate, confidence and jealousy, faithfulness and disloyalty, self-sacrifice and revenge, were still in human hearts. And these feelings would put to shame even the passions engendered in the bloody battles of the fearful warfare.

Edith Varney, for instance, had gone out of the telegraph office assured that the sacrifice she had made for her lover had resulted in the betrayal of her country ; that Thorne had had not even the common gratitude to accede to her request, although she had saved his life, and,

for the time being, his honour. Every cannon-shot, every crashing volley of musketry that came faintly or loudly across the hills seemed pointed straight at her heart. For all she knew, the despatch had been sent, the cunningly devised scheme had been carried out, and into some undefended gap in the lines the Federal troops were pouring. The defence would crumble and the Army would be cut in two; the city of Richmond would be taken, and the Confederacy would be lost.

And she had done it! Would she have done it if she had known? She had certainly expected to establish such a claim upon Thorne by her interposition that he could not disregard it. But if she had known positively that he would have done what she thought he did, would she have sent him to his death? She put the question to herself in agony. And she realised with flushes of shame and waves of contrition that she would not, could not have done this thing. She must have acted as she had, whatever was to come of it. Whatever he was, whatever he did, she loved the man. She need not tell him, she need tell no one, there could be no fruition to that love. She must hide it, bury it in her bosom if she could, but for weal or woe she loved him above everything else, and for all eternity.

Where was he now? Her interposition had been but for a few moments. The truth was certain to be discovered. There would be no ultimate escape possible for him. She heard shots on occasion nearer than Petersburg, in the city streets. What could they mean? Short, short would be his shrift if they caught him. Had they caught him? Certainly they must, if they

had not. She realised with a thrill that she had given him an opportunity to escape and that he had refused it. The sending of that despatch had been more to him than life. Traitor, spy, Secret Service Agent—was there anything that could be said for him ? At least he was faithful to his own idea of duty.

She had met Caroline Mitford waiting in the lower hall of the telegraph office, and the two, convoyed by old Martha, had come home together. Many curious glances had been thrown at them, but in these great movements that were toward, no one molested them. The younger girl had seen the agony in her friend's face. She had timidly sought to question her, but she had received no answer or no satisfactio to her queries. Refusing Caroline's proffered services when she reached home, Edith had gone straight to her own room and locked the door.

The affair had been irritating beyond expression to Mr. Arrelsford. It had taken him some time to establish his innocence and to get his release from General Randolph's custody. Meanwhile, everything that he had hoped to prevent had happened. To do him justice, he really loved Edith Varney, and the thought that her actions and her words had caused his own undoing and the failure of his carefully laid plans, filled him with bitterness, which he vented in increased animosity toward Thorne.

These were bitter moments to Mrs. Varney. She had become somewhat used to her husband being in the thick of things, but it was her boy now who was in the ranks. The noise of the cannon and the passing troops threw Howard into a fever of anxiety which was very bad for him.

And those were dreadful moments to Thorne. What had he done? He had risked everything, was ready to pay everything, would, indeed, be forced to do so in the end, and yet he had not done that which he had intended. Had he been false to his duty and to his country when he refused to send that telegram, being given the opportunity? He could not tell. The ethics of the question were beyond his present solution. The opportunity had come to him through a piece of sublime self-sacrifice on the part of the woman, who, knowing him thoroughly and understanding his plan and purpose, had yet perjured herself to save his life.

That life was hers, was it not? He had become her prisoner as much as if she had placed him under lock and key and held him without the possibility of communication with any one. Her honour was involved. No, under the circumstances, he could not send the despatch. The Confederates would certainly kill him if they caught him, and if they did not, and by any providential chance he escaped, his honour would compel him to report the circumstances, the cause of his failure, to his own superiors. Would they court-martial him for not sending the despatch? Would they enter into his feelings, would they understand? Would the woman and her actions be considered by them as determining factors? Would his course be looked upon as justifiable? He could not flatter himself that any one of these things would be so considered by any military court. There would be only two things which would influence his superiors in their judgment of him. Did he get a chance, and having it, did he use it?

The popular idea of a Secret Service Agent, a spy, was that he would stick at nothing. As such men were outside the pale of military brotherhood, so were they supposed to have a code of their own. Well, his code did not permit him to send the despatch when his power to send it had been procured in such a way. It was not so much love for the woman as it was honour—her honour, suddenly put into his keeping—that turned him from the key. When both honour and love were thrown into the scale, there was no possibility of any other action. He could not see any call of duty paramount to them.

He stood looking at Foray for a while, and then, without a further command to that intensely surprised young man, or even a word of explanation, he seized his hat and coat and left the room. Foray was a keen-witted officer, he reviewed the situation briefly, and presently a great light dawned upon him. A certain admiration for Thorne developed in his breast, and as Allison opportunely came back at this juncture, he turned over the telegraph office to his subordinate, and in his turn went out on what he believed to be an exceedingly important errand.

Thorne found the streets full of people. He had not marked the beginning of the cannonading in the tumult of the office, but the lights, the bells pealing alarms from every church-steeple, the trampling of horses and men, and the roll of the gun-carriages apprised him of what was toward. Trusting that Thorne had been able to carry out his part, Grant was attacking the place indicated by "Plan 3" in heavy force.

What was Thorne to do? Obviously attempt

to escape from Richmond, although it would be a matter of extreme difficulty on account of the alarm which now aroused every section. He could not go, either, until he had seen his brother. He surmised that he was dead, but he could not know that; and he determined not to attempt to leave without making assurance doubly sure. It was a duty he owed to his brother, to his father in the Union Army, and to his superiors in the Federal Secret Service. If that brother were alive, he must be at the Varney house. He fancied that he would run as little chance of being observed in the excitement going in that direction as in any other, and he started to make his way there.

The fact that Edith was there influenced him also. Was the call of love and the living as great, or greater than the call of duty and the dying or the dead? Who shall say?

And the remote chance that he might be observed on the way was taken by his ever-vigilant enemy; for Arrelsford, upon obtaining his freedom, had sent the troops at the disposal of the Secret Service to hunt him down, and one of them caught sight of him. The shout of the observer apprised him of his discoverer. He threw one glance behind him and then ran for his life. He had no especial hope of escaping, but he might get to the Varney house ahead of the soldiers, and he might see his brother, and he might see the woman he loved for a moment before he was taken and killed.

If it had not been for the two he would have stopped and given himself up. Somehow he did not care for life. His life was forfeit to the Federals and the Confederates alike. When she

thought to save it, Edith Varney had doomed him. Also he felt that she had damned him. But he ran on and on, doubling and turning on his tracks; white-faced, desperate, his breath coming fainter, his heart beating faster, as he ran.

CHAPTER XVII

WILFRED PLAYS THE MAN

A SHARP contrast to the noise outside was presented by the quiet of the Varney house inside. The sewing women, in view of the attack and the movements of the boys and the old men, had separated sooner than they had intended and had gone their several ways. Old Jonas, frightened to death, remained locked up in the cupboard where he had been left by Arrelsford's men. Martha was upstairs in Howard's room, making ready to watch over him during the night.

Caroline Mitford had not gone home. She had sent word that she intended to pass the night at the Varney house. Somehow she thought they seemed to need her. She was standing by one of the long front windows in the drawing-room, now a scene of much disorder because of the recent struggle. Tables were thrust aside out of their places, chairs were turned over, and there was a big dark spot on the carpet where Henry Dumont had poured out his life-blood unavailingly.

Caroline stared out of the window at the flashes of light. She listened, with heaving breast and throbbing heart, to the roar of the cannon and the rattle of musketry. She had heard both many times lately, but now it was

different, for Wilfred was there. Mrs. Varney came upon her with her hand pressed against her breast, her face white and staring, tears brimming her eyes, but, as usual, Mrs. Varney was so engrossed with her own tremendous troubles that she had little thought for the girl.

"Caroline," she began anxiously, "tell me what happened. Edith won't speak to me. She has locked herself up in her room. What was it? Where has she been? What——"

"She was at the telegraph office," answered Caroline in a low voice.

"What did she do there? What happened there?"

"I am not sure."

"But try to tell me, dear."

"I would if I could, Mrs. Varney, but I was afraid and ran out and waited for her in the hall. The rest of them——" The girl broke off as the deep tones of the city bells clanged sharply above the diapason of artillery.

"It's the alarm bell," said Mrs. Varney.

"Yes," said Caroline, "they are calling out the last reserves."

"Yes; hark to the cannonading. Isn't it awful?" returned Mrs. Varney. "They must be making a terrible attack to-night. Lieutenant Maxwell was right; that quiet spell was a signal."

"There goes another battery of artillery," said Caroline, staring through the window. "A man told us that they were sending them all over to Cemetery Hill. That's where the fighting is, Cemetery Hill."

"General Varney's Division is to the right of that position, or was the last time I heard from him," said Mrs. Varney anxiously.

The two women looked at each other for a moment, both of them thinking the same thought, to which neither dared give utterance. The object of their thought was the boy, and the continuous flashes of light on the horizon seemed to make the situation more horrible.

"I am afraid they are going to have a bad time of it to-night," said Caroline, drawing the curtains and turning away from the window.

"I'm afraid so," was the rejoinder. "Now, try to think, dear, who was at the telegraph office? Can't you tell me something that occurred that will explain Edith's silence? She looks like death, and——"

"I can't tell you anything except that they arrested Mr. Arrelsford."

"Mr. Arrelsford! You don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do," answered Caroline. "General Randolph,—I went and brought him there, because they wouldn't send my telegram,—he was in a fearful temper——"

"But Edith? Can't you tell me what she did?"

"I can't, Mrs. Varney, for I don't know. I waited for her in the hall, and when she came out she couldn't speak. Then we hurried home. I tried to get her to tell me, but she wouldn't say a word except that her heart was broken, and that's all I know, Mrs. Varney, truly, truly."

"I believe you, my dear. I know you would tell me if you could."

"I certainly would, for I love——"

There was a loud ring at the front door. It was evidently unlocked, for, without waiting for an answer, it was thrown open roughly, and through the hall and into the drawing-room

stalked Mr. Arrelsford. He was wildly excited, evidently in a tremendous hurry, and utterly oblivious to manners or anything else. He had been checked and thwarted so many times that he was in a bad temper for anything.

"Is your daughter in the house?" he began roughly, without any further preliminaries or salutation, without even removing his hat.

Mrs. Varney drew herself up and looked at him. But he paid no attention to her at all.

"Answer," he said harshly.

She bowed her head in the affirmative, scarcely able to speak in her indignation at his manner and bearing.

"I wish to see her."

"I don't believe she will care to receive you at present," returned her mother quietly.

"What she cares to do at present is of small consequence. I must see her at once. Shall I go up to her room with these men, or will you have her down here?"

The room had filled with soldiers as the two spoke together.

"Neither the one nor the other, sir," said Mrs. Varney, who was not in the least afraid of Mr. Arrelsford or his soldiers, "until I know your business with her."

"My business,—a few questions,—I've got a few questions to ask her. Listen to that noise out yonder? Do you hear those guns and the troops passing by? Now, you know what 'Attack to-night, Plan 3,' means."

"Is that the attack?" asked Mrs. Varney.

"That's the attack. They are breaking through our lines at Cemetery Hill. That was the place indicated by 'Plan 3.' We are rushing

to the front all the reserves we have, to the last man and boy, but they may not get there in time."

"What, may I ask, has my daughter to do with it?"

"Do with it? She did it!" asserted Arrelsford bitterly.

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Varney, in a great outburst of indignation. "How dare you!"

"We had him in a trap, under arrest, the telegraph under guard, when she brought in that commission. We would have shot him in a moment, but they took me prisoner and let him go."

"Impossible!" whispered Mrs. Varney. "You don't mean——"

"Yes, she did. She put the game in his hands. He got control of the wires and the despatch went through. As soon as I could get to headquarters I explained, and they saw the trick. They rushed the guard back, but the scoundrel had got away. Foray was gone, too, and Allison knew nothing about it, but we're after him, and if she knows where he is," he turned as if to leave the room and ascend the stairs, "I will get it out of her."

"You don't suppose that my daughter would—" began Mrs. Varney.

"I suppose everything."

"I will not believe it," persisted the mother.

"We can't wait for what you believe," said Arrelsford roughly, this time taking a step toward the door.

Mrs. Varney caught him by the arm.

"Let me speak to her," she pleaded.

"No, I will see her myself."

But Miss Mitford, who had been the indirect

cause of so much trouble, once more interposed. She had listened to him with scarcely less surprise than that developing in Mrs. Varney's breast. She took a malicious joy in thwarting the Secret Service Agent. She barred the way, her slight figure in the door, with arms extended.

"Where is your order for this?" she asked.

Arrelsford stared at her in surprise.

"Get out of my way," he said curtly; "I have a word or two to say to you after I have been upstairs."

"Show me your order," persisted the girl, who made not the slightest attempt to give way.

"It's Department business and I don't require an order."

"You are mistaken about that," said Caroline with astonishing resourcefulness. "This is a private house, it isn't the telegraph office or the Secret Service Department. If you want to go upstairs to see anybody against their will, you will have to bring an order. I don't know much, but I know enough for that."

Arrelsford turned to Mrs. Varney.

"Am I to understand, madam," he began, "that you refuse——"

But before Mrs. Varney could answer, the soldiers Arrelsford had brought with him gave way before the advent of a sergeant and another party of men. The Sergeant advanced directly to Mrs. Varney, touched his cap to her, and began:

"Are you the lady that lives here, ma'am?"

"Yes, I am Mrs. Varney."

"I have an order from General Randolph's office to search this house for——"

"Just in time," said Arrelsford, stepping to-

ward the Sergeant; "I will go through the house with you."

"Can't go through on this order," said the Sergeant shortly.

"You were sent here to——" began Mrs. Varney.

"Yes; sorry to trouble you, ma'am, but we'll have to be quick about it. If we don't find him here we've got to follow him down Franklin Street; he's over this way somewhere."

"Who are you? What do you want?"

"Man named Thorne, Captain of Artillery," answered the Sergeant; "that's what he went by, at least. Here, two of you this way! That room in there and the back of the house. Two of you outside," pointing to the windows. "Cut off those windows. The rest upstairs."

The men rapidly dispersed, obeying the commands of the Sergeant, and began a thorough search of the house. Caroline Mitford preceded them up the stairs to Edith's room. Arrelsford, after a moment's hesitation, stepped toward the door and went out, followed by his men. Without a word of acknowledgment or even a bow to Mrs. Varney, he and his men presently left the house. As he did so, two of the Sergeant's men re-entered the room, shoving old Jonas roughly before them. The man's livery was torn and dirty, his head was bound up, and he showed signs of the rough handling he had undergone.

"Where did you get that?" asked the Sergeant contemptuously.

"He was locked in a cupboard, sir."

"What were you doing in there?" He turned to the old negro. "If you don't answer me, we will shoot the life out of you." He raised his

revolver threateningly. "Belongs to you, I reckon," he said to Mrs. Varney.

"Yes, my butler; they locked him up. Mr. Arrelsford wants him for carrying a message."

"That's all right," said the Sergeant. "If he wants him, he can have him. We're looking for some one else. Put him back in his cupboard. Here, this room! Be quick now! Cover that door. Sorry to disturb you, ma'am."

"Do what you please," said Mrs. Varney; "I have nothing on earth to conceal."

As the men hurriedly withdrew to continue their search, the voice of a newcomer was heard on the porch. The words came to them clearly:

"Here, lend a hand, somebody, will you?"

The next moment General Varney's orderly entered the room, caught sight of the Sergeant, saluted, and then turned to Mrs. Varney.

"I've brought back your boy, ma'am," he said.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Varney faintly; "what do you mean——"

"We never got out to General Varney's. We ran into a Yankee raiding party, cavalry, down here about three miles. Our home-guard was galloping by on the run to head them off, and before I knew what he was about, the boy was in with 'em, riding like mad. There was a bit of a skirmish, and he got a clip across the neck. Nothing at all, ma'am. He rode back all the way, and——"

"Oh, my boy! He's hurt—he's hurt——"

"Nothing serious, ma'am; don't upset yourself," returned the orderly reassuringly.

"Where did you——"

But that moment the object of their solicitude himself appeared on the scene. The boy was

very pale, and his neck was bandaged. Two of the Sergeant's men supported him.

"Oh, Wilfred!" cried his mother; "my boy!"

"It's nothing, mother," said Wilfred, motioning her away. "You don't understand." The boy tried to free himself from the men who still held him by the arm. "What do you want to hold me like that for?" he expostulated, as he drew himself away and took a few steps. "You see I can walk," he protested.

His words were brave, but his performance was weak. His mother came close to him and extended her arms towards him. But Wilfred was a soldier now, and he did not want any scenes. Therefore, with a great effort, he took her hand in as casual a manner as possible, quite like a stranger paying an afternoon call.

"How do you do, mother?" he said. "You didn't expect me back so soon, did you? I will tell you how it was. Don't you go away, orderly. I will just rest a minute, and then I will go back with you." Another outburst of the cannon and the frantic pealing of the alarm bells caught his attention. "See, they are ringing the bells calling out the reserves." He started toward the door. "I will go right now."

"No, no, Wilfred," said his mother, taking his arm; "not now, my son."

"Not now?" said Wilfred, whose weakness was growing apparent. "Do you hear those—those—those bells and—then tell me not—to go—why——"

He swayed and tottered.

"Stand by there!" cried the Sergeant.

The two men immediately caught hold of him as he fainted. They carried him to the lounge.

"Find some water, will you?" continued the Sergeant. "Put his head down, ma'am, and he'll be all right in a minute. He's only fainted."

One of the privates who had hurried off in search of water soon came back with a basin full, with which Mrs. Varney laved the boy's head.

"He'll be all right in a minute," said the Sergeant. "Come, men."

He turned as he spoke, and, followed by the men, left the room, leaving Mrs. Varney with Wilfred and the orderly. It was the latter who broke the silence.

"If there isn't anything else, ma'am, I believe I'd better report back to the General."

"Yes," said Mrs. Varney, "don't wait. The wound is dressed, isn't it?"

"Yes; I took him to the Winder Hospital. They said he would be on his feet in a day or two, but he wants to be kept pretty quiet."

"Tell the General how it happened."

"Very well, ma'am," said the orderly, touching his cap and going out.

The next person to enter the room was Caroline Mitford. The noise of the men searching the house was very plain. Having informed Edith of the meaning of the tumult, she had come downstairs to enquire if they had found Thorne. She came slowly within the door—rather listlessly, in fact. The exciting events of the night in which she had taken part had somewhat sapped her natural vivacity, but she was shocked into instant action when she saw Wilfred stretched upon the sofa.

"Oh!" she breathed in a low, tense whisper; "what is it? Is he——"

"Caroline dear," said Mrs. Varney, "it is

nothing serious. He isn't badly hurt. He was cut in the neck and fainted. There, there,"—the woman rose from Wilfred's side and caught the girl,—"don't you faint, too, dear."

"I am not going to faint," said Caroline desperately. She took Mrs. Varney's handkerchief from the latter's hand, and dipped it in the water. "I can take care of him," she continued, kneeling down by her boyish lover. "I don't need anybody down here at all. The men are going all over the house and——"

"But, Caroline——" began Mrs. Varney.

"Mrs. Varney," returned the girl, strangely quiet, "there's a heap of soldiers upstairs, looking in all the rooms. I think you'd better go and attend to them. They will be in Edith's room, or Howard's, in a minute."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Varney, "and Howard so ill. I must go for a few minutes, anyway. You know what to do?"

"Oh, yes," answered the girl confidently.

"Bathe his forehead. He isn't badly hurt, dear. I won't be long, and he will soon come to, I am sure," said Mrs. Varney, hastening away.

Presently Wilfred opened his eyes. He stared about him unmeaningly and uncomprehendingly for the moment.

"Wilfred, dear Wilfred," began the girl in soft, low, caressing tones, "you are not hurt much, are you? Oh, not much! There, you will feel better in just a moment, dear Wilfred."

"Is there—are you——?" questioned Wilfred striving to concentrate his mind on the problem of his whereabouts and her presence.

"Oh, Wilfred, don't you know me?"

"What are you talking about?" said Wilfred

more strongly. "Of course I know you. Where am I?" And as full consciousness came back to him, "What am I doing, anyway? Taking a bath?"

"No, no, Wilfred; you see I am bathing your head. You fainted a little, and——"

"Fainted!" exclaimed Wilfred in deep disgust. "I fainted!" He made a feeble attempt to rise, but sank back weakly. "Yes, of course, I was in a fight with the Yankees and got wounded somewhere."

He stopped, puzzled, staring strangely, almost afraid, at Caroline.

"What is it?" asked the girl.

"See here," he began seriously; "I will tell you one thing right now. I am not going to burden you with a cripple, not much."

His resignation was wonderful.

"Cripple!" exclaimed Caroline, bewildered.

"I reckon I've got an arm knocked off, haven't I?"

"No. you haven't, Wilfred; they are both on all right"

"Perhaps it was a hand that they shot away?"

"Not a single one," said Caroline.

"Are my—my ears on all right?"

"Yes," answered the girl. "You needn't bother about them for a moment."

Wilfred staked all on the last question.

"How many legs have I got left?"

"All of them," answered Caroline; "every one."

"Then, if there's enough of me left to—to amount to anything—you'll take charge of it, just the same? How about that?"

"That's all right," said the girl, burying her face on his shoulder.

Wilfred got hold of her hand and kissed it passionately. He seemed quite strong enough for that.

"I tried to send you a telegram but they wouldn't let me," whispered Caroline suddenly, raising her head and looking at him.

"You did?"

"Yes."

"What did you say in it?"

But here the girl's courage failed her.

"Tell me what you said," persisted Wilfred.

"It was something very nice," faltered poor Caroline.

"It was, eh?"

"Yes."

"Was it as nice as this?" asked Wilfred, suddenly lifting his head and kissing her.

"I don't know about that," stammered Caroline, blushing a beautiful crimson, "but it was very nice. I wouldn't have tried to telegraph it if it was something bad, would I?"

"Well, if it was so good," said Wilfred, "why on earth didn't you send it?"

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Caroline; "how could I when they wouldn't let me?"

"Wouldn't let you?"

"I should think not. They had a dreadful time at the telegraph office."

"At the telegraph office; were you there?" Wilfred made a violent effort to recollect. "I have it," he said in stronger tones; "they told me at the hospital. I must get up."

"No, no; you mustn't," said Caroline, interposing.

"Don't," said Wilfred; "I have to attend to it." He spoke with a stern, strange decision, entirely foreign to his previous idle love-making. "I know all about Thorne. He gets hold of our Department Telegraph and sends out a false order, weakens our defences at Cemetery Hill." The boy got to his feet by this time, steadying himself by Caroline's shoulder. "They are down on us in a moment." A look of pain, not physical, shot across his face, but he mastered it. "And she gave it to him, the commission; my sister Edith!" he continued bitterly.

"Oh!" said Caroline; "you know——"

"I know this. If my father were here, he'd see her. As he isn't here, I will attend to it. Send her to me."

He spoke weakly, but in a clear voice and a most imperative manner. He took his hand off Caroline's shoulder. If he were to deal with this, so grave and critical a situation, he must do it without feminine support. By a great effort he held himself resolutely erect, repeating his command.

"Send her to me"

"No," said Caroline faintly, just as Mrs. Varney re-entered the room.

"What is it?" asked the mother.

"He wants to see Edith," returned the girl.

"Not now, Wilfred," persisted Mrs. Varney; "you are weak and ill, and Edith——"

"Tell her to come here, I must see her at once," repeated Wilfred.

Mrs. Varney instantly divined the reason. Caroline had told him about the telegraph office, but she could see no advantage to be gained by the interview he sought.

"It won't do you any good, Wilfred," she said. "She won't speak a word to anybody about it."

"I don't want her to speak to me," returned the boy grimly; "I am going to speak to her."

"But some other time, Wilfred," urged his mother.

"No, no; immediately," but as no one made the slightest effort toward complying with his demand, "Very well," he continued, moving slowly toward the door, and by a determined effort keeping his feet. "If you won't send her to me, I will——"

"There, there," said Mrs. Varney, interposing swiftly; "If you must, you must. Since you insist, I will call her."

"I do insist."

"Stay with him, dear," said Mrs. Varney to Caroline, "and I will go and call her."

"No," said Wilfred, "I want to see her alone."

Wondering much at this move of her boy-lover, but somehow feeling that Wilfred represented his father and the law, Caroline, after one long look at his pale but composed face, turned and followed Mrs. Varney out of the room.

CHAPTER XVIII

CAPTAIN THORNE JUSTIFIES HIMSELF

After the two women had left him, Wilfred stood motionless for a moment, and then sat wearily down to rest. Scarcely had he done so when he heard shouts far outside in the street, the heavy trampling of feet, cries, directions, orders. He rose and walked over to the window. The cries were growing louder and the footsteps more distinct. Men were approaching the house rapidly, he could tell that they were running. What could they be? What was toward? A suspicion flashed into his mind. It had hardly found lodgment there when Thorne sprang upon the porch, leaped across it, and burst through the other front window into the long room. A pedestal with a bust of Washington on it was standing between the windows. As Thorne sprang back from the window, he knocked against it. It fell to the floor with a tremendous crash.

He stood staring a moment toward the window, listening while the noise of the running feet died away in the distance. It seemed that he had distanced his pursuers or eluded them for the time being. It could only be for a moment, however; he had other things to think of. Well, that moment would be enough; it was all he required.

He turned to go down the room, only to find himself confronted by the boy.

It is hard to say which was the more surprised of the two—Thorne at seeing Wilfred, or Wilfred at Thorne's appearance. The latter's face was pale, his breath was coming rapidly, he was bareheaded. His brow was covered with sweat, and he had the hunted, desperate look of a man at the very end of his resources. Neither at first said anything to the other. It was Thorne who first recovered himself. He sought to pass by the boy, but Wilfred seized him.

"Halt!" he cried; "you are under arrest."

"Wait a moment!" gasped out Thorne; "and I will go with you."

As he spoke he shook himself loose from the weak grasp of the wounded young man, and started down the room.

"Halt, I say!" cried Wilfred. "You are my prisoner."

"All right, all right," said Thorne quietly; "your prisoner, anything you like. Here,"—he drew his revolver from his pocket and pushed it into the boy's hand; "take this, shoot the life out of me, if you wish, but give me a chance to see my brother first."

"Your brother?"

"Yes. He was shot here to-night. I want one look at his face; that's all."

"Where is he?"

"Maybe they put him in the room across the hall yonder."

"What would he be doing here?" asked Wilfred, not yet apprehending the situation from Thorne's remarks.

"Nothing," said the other bitterly; "I guess he is dead."

"Wait," said Wilfred. He stepped across the hall, keeping Thorne covered with his revolver. "Don't move; I will see." He threw open the door, glanced in, and then came back. "It's a lie!" he said.

"What!" exclaimed Thorne.

"There is no one in there. It is just one of your tricks. Call the guard!" He shouted toward the hall, and then toward the window. "Sergeant of the Guard! Captain Thorne is here, in this house."

He stepped out on the porch and shouted again with astonishing power for one so painfully wounded as he. Then the boy felt a faintness come over him. He sank down on a seat on the porch and leaned his head against the house, and sought to recover his strength, fighting a desperate battle; fearful lest Thorne should escape while he was thus helpless.

It was Edith Varney who first replied to his frantic summons by hurrying into the room. She was as much surprised to see Thorne as he was to see her. Her heart leaped in her bosom at the sight of him, and she stared at him as at a wraith or a vision.

"You wouldn't tell me an untruth, would you?" said Thorne, coming closer to her. "He was shot in this room an hour ago, my brother Henry. I'd like to take one look at his dead face before they send me the same way. Where is he? Can't you tell me that much, Miss Varney? Is he in the house?"

Edith looked at his face, shook her head a little, and moved away from him toward the table.

Thorne threw up his hands in a gesture of despair, and turned toward the window. As he did so, Wilfred, having recovered from his faintness a little, called out again :

"The guard! The escaped prisoner, Captain Thorne!"

This time his frantic outcry was answered. At last they were closing in upon the wretched man. He turned from the window and faced the girl, scarcely less wretched than he, and laughed shortly.

"They are on the scent, you see," he said ; "they'll get me in a minute ; and when they do, it won't take them long to finish me off. And as that'll be the last of me, Miss Varney, maybe you'll listen to one thing. We can't all die a soldier's death, in the roar and glory of battle, our friends about us, under the flag we love. No, not all! Some of us have orders for another kind of work, dare-devil, desperate work, the hazardous schemes, of the Secret Service. We fight our battles alone no comrades to cheer us on, ten thousand to one against us, death at every turn. If we win, we escape with our lives ; if we lose, we are dragged out and butchered like dogs. No soldier's grave, not even a trench with the rest of the boys—alone, despised, forgotten! These were my orders, Miss Varney : this is the death I die to-night, and I don't want you to think for one moment that I am ashamed of it ; no, not for one moment."

The sound of heavy feet drew nearer. Wilfred called again, while the two in the room confronted each other, the man erect, and the woman, too. A strange pain was in her heart. At least here was a man, but before she could say a word in

answer to his impassioned defence, the room filled with soldiers.

"There's your man, Sergeant," said Wilfred; "I hand him over to you."

"You are my prisoner," said the Sergeant.

His command was reinforced by a number of others, including Corporal Matson and his squad, and some of the men of the Provost Guard, who had been chasing Thorne through the streets. At this juncture, Arrelsford, panting and breathless, also joined the company in the drawing-room. He came in rapidly, thrusting aside those in his way.

"Where is he?" he cried. "Ah!" he exclaimed triumphantly, as his eye fell upon Thorne, standing quietly, surrounded by the soldiers. "We've got him, have we?"

"Young Mr. Varney, here, took him, sir," said the Sergeant.

"So," returned Arrelsford to his prisoner, "run down at last. Now, you will find out what it costs to play your little game with our Government telegraph lines."

But Thorne did not turn his head, although Arrelsford spoke almost in his ear He looked straight at Edith Varney, and she returned his glance.

"Don't waste any time, Sergeant," said Arrelsford furiously. "Take him down the street and shoot him full of lead. Out with him."

"Very well, sir," said the Sergeant.

But Wilfred interposed. He came forward, Thorne's revolver still in his hand.

"No," he said decisively; "whatever he is, whatever he has done, he has the right to a trial."

"The head of the Secret Service Department

said to me if I found him, to shoot him at sight," snarled Arrelsford.

"I don't care what General Tarleton said. I captured this man; he's in this house, and he is not going out unless he is treated fairly."

The Sergeant looked uncertainly from Wilfred to Arrelsford. Mrs. Varney, who had entered with the rest of them, and who now stood by her daughter's side, looked her approval at her son. The mettle of his distinguished father was surely in his veins.

"Well done," said the woman softly, but not so softly that those about her did not hear; "your father would have spoken so."

Arrelsford came to a sudden decision.

"Well, let him have a trial. We'll give him a drumhead court-martial, but it will be the quickest ever held on earth. Stack your muskets here, and organise a court," he said.

"Fall in here," cried the Sergeant, at which the men quickly took their places. "Attention! Stack arms! Two of you take the prisoner. Where shall we find a vacant room, ma'am?"

"Across the hall," said Mrs. Varney; "where the ladies were sewing this evening."

"Very good," said the Sergeant. "Left face! Forward, march!"

Arrelsford and Wilfred followed the soldiers.

"I am the chief witness," said the former.

"I will see that he gets fair play," remarked the latter, as they marched out.

"I must go to Howard," said Mrs. Varney; "this excitement is killing him; I am afraid he will hardly survive the night. Caroline is with him now."

"Very well, mother," said Edith, going slowly

up the now deserted room and standing in the window, looking out into the night, thinking her strange, appalling thoughts. They would convict him, shoot him, there was no hope. What had he said ? He was not ashamed of his work. It was the highest duty and involved the highest and noblest sacrifice, because it made the greatest demand ; and they would shoot him like a mad dog.

" Oh, God ! " she whispered ; " if some bullet would only find my heart as well."

CHAPTER XIX

THE DRUMHEAD COURT-MARTIAL

It so happened that the soldiers who had thrust old Jonas back in his cupboard, whence they had taken him a short time before, in their haste, had failed to lock the door upon him. The negro, who had listened for the click of the key in the lock, had at once known of their carelessness. So soon as they had withdrawn from the room, and their search took them to other parts of the house, he had opened the door cautiously and had made his way toward the hall by the drawing-room, which he felt instinctively was the place where the exciting events of the night would soon culminate.

Thorne's entry and the circumstances of his apprehension had been so engrossing that no one had given a thought to Jonas, or to any other part of the house, for that matter, and he had been able to see everything through the hangings. He was a quick-witted old negro, and he knew, of course, that there would be but one verdict given by such a court-martial as had assembled. Now, the men who composed the court would of necessity be detailed to carry out their own sentence. The long room was filled with stacks of guns. Every soldier, even those under the command of Corporal Matson in Arrelsford's Department, had

gone to the court-martial. There was nothing else of interest to attract them in the house. Every gun was there in that room, unguarded.

A recent capture of a battalion of Federal riflemen had put the Confederates into possession of a few hundred breech-loading weapons, not of the latest and most approved pattern, for the cartridges in these guns were in cardboard shells, but still better than any the South possessed. These rifles had been distributed to some of the companies in garrison at Richmond, and it so happened that the men of the Secret Service squad and the Provost Guard had received most of them. Every gun in the stacks was of this pattern.

In his earlier days, Jonas had been his young master's personal attendant, his body-servant, and as such he had often gone hunting with him. During the war he had frequently visited him in camp, charged with messages of one sort or another, and he knew all about weapons.

As he stared into the long room after the departing soldiers, he did not know Edith Varney was still there, nor could he see her at all, for she was on the other side of the curtain, looking out of the window, and it seemed to him that the room was empty.

Jonas was a very intelligent negro, and while under any ordinary circumstances his devotion to his master and mistress would have been absolutely sure, yet he had become tinged with the ideas of freedom and liberty in the air. He had assisted many and many a Union prisoner. Captain Thorne, by his pleasant ways and nice address, had won his heart. And he himself was deeply concerned personally that the young man should

not be punished for his attempt to bring about the success of the Union cause, which Jonas felt to be his own cause. Therefore he had a double motive to secure the freedom of his principal if it were in any way possible. Of course, any direct interposition was out of the question. He was still only a slave. His open interference would have been fruitless of any consequences except bad ones for himself, and he was already more than compromised by the events of the night. What he was to do he must do by stealth.

As he stared at the pyramids of guns, listening to the hum of conversation from the room across the hall—the door had been fortunately closed—a thought came to him. He pushed aside the portières with which he had concealed himself, and entered the room by the back door. He glanced about apprehensively. He was not burdened with any overplus of physical courage, and what he did was the more remarkable, especially in view of the fact that the soldiers might return at any moment and catch him at what they could very easily construe as an act of high treason, which would result in his blood being mingled with that of Captain Thorne, in the same gutter, probably.

He moved with cat-like swiftness in the direction of the first stack of rifles. He knelt down by it, seized the nearest gun, which lay across the other three, swiftly opened the breech-plug, drew out the cartridge, looked at it a moment, put the end of it in his mouth, and crunched his strong white teeth down upon it. When he finished, he had the leaden bullet in his mouth, and the cardboard shell in his hand. He replaced this latter in the chamber and closed the breech-

plug. A smile of triumph irradiated his sable features. The gun could be fired, but whatever or whoever stood in front of it would be unharmed.

He had not been quite sure that he could do this, but the result of his experiment convinced him. All the other guns were of the same character, and, given the time, he could render them all harmless. He did not waste time in reflection, but started in with the same process on the others. He worked with furious haste until every bullet had been bitten off every cartridge. It would have been impossible to have drawn the bullets of the ordinary muzzle-loading rifle, or army musket, in twenty times the period.

The noise of Jonas' first entrance had attracted the attention of Edith Varney. She had turned with the intention of going into the room, but, on second thought, she had concealed herself further behind the curtains. Between the wall and the edge of the portières was a little space, through which she peered. She saw the whole performance, and divined instantly what was in Jonas' mind, and what the result of his actions would be.

In an incredibly short time, considering what he had to do, the old negro finished his task. He rose to his feet and stood staring triumphantly at the long stacks of guns. He even permitted himself a low chuckle, with a glance across the hall to the court. Well, he had at least done something worthy of a man's approbation in this dramatic game in which he was so humble a player.

Now Edith Varney, who had observed him with mingled admiration and resentment—resentment that he had proven false to her people, her family; and admiration at his cleverness—stepped further

into the room as he finished the last musket, and, as he started toward the lower end of the room to make good his escape, she coughed slightly.

Jonas stopped and wheeled about instantly, frightened to death, of course, but somewhat relieved when he saw who it was who had had him under observation, and who had interrupted him. He realised at once that it was no use to attempt to conceal anything, and he threw himself upon the mercy of his young mistress, and, with great adroitness, sought to enlist her support for what he had done.

"Dey's gwine to shoot him, shoot him down lak a dog, missy," he said in a low, pleading whisper, "an' Ah couldn't bear to see 'em do dat. Ah wouldn't lak to see him killed, Ah wouldn't lak it noways. You won't say nuffin' about dis fo' de sake ob old Jonas, what always was so fond ob you ebah since you was a little chile. You see, Ah jes' tek dese yeah"— he extended his hand, full of leaden bullets—"an' den dey won't be no ha'm cum to him whatsomevah, les'n dey loads 'em up agin. When dey shoots, an' he jes' draps down, dey'll roll him obah into de guttah, an' be off lak mad. Den Ah kin be neah by an' "—he stopped, and, if his face had been full of apprehension before, it now became transformed with anxiety. "How's he gwine to know?" he asked.. "If he don't drap down, dey'll shoot him agin, an' dey'll hab bullets in dem next time. What Ah gwine to do, how Ah gwine to tell him?"

Edith had listened to him as one in a dream. Her face had softened a little. After all, this negro had done this thing for the man she—God forgive her—still loved.

"You tell him," whispered Jonas; "you tell him, it's de on'y way. Tell him to drap down. Do dis fo' ole Jonas, honey; do it fo' me, an' Ah'll be a slabe to you as long as Ah lib, no mattah what Mars Linkum does. Listen," said the old man, as a sudden commotion was heard in the room across the hall. "Dey gwine to kill him. You do it."

Nothing could be gained by remaining. He had said all he could, used every argument possible to him, and, realising his danger, he turned and disappeared through the back door into the dark rear hall. There was a scraping of chairs and a trampling of feet, a few words heard indistinctly, and then the voice of the old Sergeant:

"Fall in! Right Face! Forward—March!"

Before they came into the hall, Jonas made one last appeal. He thrust his old black face through the portières, his eyes rolling, his jaws working.

"Fo' Gawd's sek, missy, tell him to drap down," he whispered as he disappeared.

Wilfred, not waiting for the soldiers, came into the room, and Caroline followed him.

"Where's mother?" asked Wilfred.

"She's gone up to Howard; I think he is dying," said Caroline. "She can't leave him for anybody or anything."

If Edith heard, she gave no sign. She stood motionless on the other side of the room, and stared toward the door; they would bring him back that way, and she could see him again.

"Wilfred dear," asked Caroline, "what are they going to do?"

"Shoot him."

"When?"

"Now."

"Where?"

"Out in the street."

Caroline's low exclamation of pity struck a responsive chord in Wilfred's heart. He nodded gravely, and bit his lips. He did not feel particularly happy over the situation, evidently, but the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the men. They came into the room in a double line, Thorne walking easily between them. They entered the room by the door, marched down it, came back, and ranged themselves opposite the stacks of arms.

"Halt!" cried the Sergeant. "Right Face! Take arms! Carry arms! Left face! Forward —March!"

Edith had not taken her eyes off Thorne since he had re-entered the room. She had watched him as if fascinated. He had shot at her one quick, searching glance, and then had kept his eyes averted, not because he would not like to look at her, but because he could not bear himself like a man in these last swift terrible seconds, if he did.

As the men moved to carry out their last order, the girl awoke to her surroundings.

"Wait," she said. 'Who is in command?"

"I am, miss," answered the Sergeant.

Arrelsford, who had entered with the soldiers, started at this, but he said nothing.

"I'd like to speak to the—the prisoner," continued Edith.

"I'm sorry, miss," answered the Sergeant respectfully, but abruptly; "but we haven't the time."

"Only a word, Sergeant," pleaded the girl, stepping close to him, and laying her hand on his arm.

The Sergeant looked at her a moment. What he saw in her eyes touched his very soul.

"Very well," he said. "Right face! Fall out the prisoner!"

Thorne stepped out in front of the ranks.

"Now, miss," said the Sergeant; "be quick about it."

"No!" said Wilfred sternly.

"Oh, Wilfred!" cried Caroline, laying her hand on his arm. "Let her speak to him, let her say good-bye."

There was an instant's pause. Wilfred looked from Caroline's flushed, eager face, to Edith's pale one. After all, what was the harm? He nodded his head, but no one moved. It was the Sergeant who broke the silence.

"The lady," he said, looking at Thorne, and pointing at Edith. As he spoke, he added another order. "Matson, take your squad and guard the windows. Prisoner, you can go over to the side of the room."

The Sergeant's purpose was plain. It would give Edith Varney an opportunity to say what she had to say to Thorne in a low voice if she chose, without the possibility of being overheard. The initiative must come from the woman, the man realised. It was Edith who turned and walked slowly across the room, Thorne followed her more rapidly, and the two stood side by side. They were thus so placed by the kindness of the veteran that she could speak her words, and no one could hear what they were.

"One of the servants," began the girl in a low, utterly passionless and expressionless voice, "Jonas, has taken the bullets from the guns. If you will drop when they fire, you can escape with your life."

In exactly the same level, almost monotonous, voice, Thorne whispered a pertinent question:

"Shall I do this for you?"

"It is nothing to me," said the woman quietly, and might God forgive her, she prayed, for that falsehood.

Thorne looked at her, his soul in his eyes. If her face had been carved from marble, it could not have been more expressionless and indifferent. He could not know how wildly her heart was beating underneath that stony exterior. Well, she had turned against him. He was nothing to her. There was no use living any longer. She did not care.

"Were you responsible in any way for it?" he asked.

The girl shook her head and turned away without looking at him. She had not the least idea of what he was about to do. Not one man in a thousand would have done it. Perhaps if he went to his death in some quixotic way, he might redeem himself in her eyes, had flashed into Thorne's mind, as he turned to the guard.

"Sergeant," he said, saluting. He spoke in a clear, cool, most indifferent way. "You had better take a look at the rifles of your command. I understand they have been tampered with."

"What the hell!" cried the Sergeant, seizing a piece from the nearest man. He snapped open the breech-plug and drew out the cartridge and examined it. Some one had bitten off the bullet! He saw everything clearly. "Squad ready!" he cried. "Draw cartridges!"

There was a rattling of breech-plugs and a low murmur of astonishment, as every man found that his cartridge was without a bullet.

"With ball cartridges, load!" cried the Sergeant. "Carry arms!"

When this little manœuvre, which was completed with swiftness and precision because the men were all veterans, was finished, the Sergeant turned to the prisoner, who had stood composedly watching the performance which took away his last opportunity for escape, and saluted him with distinct admiration.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," he said.

How Edith Varney kept her feet, why she did not scream or faint away, she could not tell. Thorne's words had petrified her. Her pride kept her from acknowledging what she felt. She had never dreamed of any such action on his part, and it seemed to her that she had sent him to his death again. How could she retrace her steps, repair her blunder? There was nothing to do. But her countenance changed. A look of such desperate entreaty came into her face as fully betrayed her feelings. Of the people in the room, only Arrelsford observed her, and even his jealousy and resentment were slightly softened by her visible anguish. Everybody was staring at Thorne, for they all knew the result of his remarkable action, although no one could in the least degree fathom the reason.

It was Wilfred who broke the silence. He walked slowly up to Thorne and thrust out his hand.

"I would like to shake hands with you," he said admiringly, and for the first time in the long hours a slight smile quivered about the man's lips. It was the generous, spontaneous tribute of youth that gave him that moment of melancholy satisfaction.

"Oh," thought Edith, watching her brother; "if only I dared to do the like."

"Is this for yourself?" asked Thorne, "or your father?"

"For both of us, sir," answered Wilfred.

Thorne shook him by the hand. The two looked into each other's faces, and everybody saw the satisfaction and gratification of the older man.

"That's all, Sergeant," said Thorne, turning away.

"Fall in the prisoner! Escort left face! Forward—March!" cried the Sergeant.

At that moment a man, breathless from having run rapidly, entered the room by the window. His uniform was that of an officer, and he wore a Lieutenant's shoulder-straps.

"Halt!" he cried, as he burst into the room.

"Are you in command, Sergeant?"

"Yes, sir."

"General Randolph's on the way here with orders. You will please wait until——"

But Arrelsford now interposed.

"What orders, Lieutenant? Anything to do with this case?"

The officer looked greatly surprised at this intervention by a civilian, but he answered civilly enough:

"I don't know what his orders are. He has been with the President."

"But I sent word to the Department," said Arrelsford, "that we had got the man, and were going to drumhead him on the spot."

"Then this must be the case, sir. The General wishes to be present."

"It is impossible," returned Arrelsford. "We

have already held the court, and I have sent the findings to the Secretary. The messenger is to get his approval and meet us at the corner of the street yonder. I have no doubt he is waiting there now. It is a mere formality."

"I have no further orders to give, sir," said the Lieutenant. "General Randolph will be here in a minute, but you can wait for him or not, as you see fit."

The Sergeant stood uncertain. For one thing, he was not anxious to carry out the orders he had been given now. That one little action of Thorne's had changed the whole situation. For another thing, Arrelsford was only a civilian, and General Randolph was one of the ranking officers in Richmond.

"Move on, Sergeant," said Arrelsford peremptorily. "You have all the authority you want, and——"

The Sergeant held back, uncertainly, but the day was saved by the advent of the General himself.

CHAPTER XX

THE LAST REPRIEVE

General Randolph was evidently in a great hurry. Public affairs of great moment pressed upon him, and it was an evidence of the interest he took in the case of Captain Thorne that he gave him even a minute of his valuable time. He had come on horseback, and everybody could see that he was anxious to get through with his appointed task and get away.

"Ah, Sergeant," he said, answering the latter's salute as he brought the guard to attention, and then his eye fell upon Captain Thorne. "You have the prisoner, have you?"

"Just taking him out, sir," answered the Sergeant, saluting again.

"To prison?"

"No, sir."

"Where, then?"

"To execute the sentence of the court, sir."

"Oh!" exclaimed the General, looking hard at the Sergeant. "He has had his trial, has he?"

But Arrelsford, who chafed at thus being left out of the game, now stepped over and took up the burden of the conversation before the Sergeant could reply.

"We have done everything according to regulation, sir," he said, saluting in a rather cavalier

manner. He did not like General Randolph. If it had not been for his interference, the affair would have been settled long ago, and he still cherished a grudge against the latter for having arrested a man so important as the trusted agent of the Secret Service. "The findings have gone to the Secretary."

"Ah!" said General Randolph blandly. He did not like Mr. Arrelsford any better than Mr. Arrelsford liked him.

"Yes, sir."

"And he was found guilty, I presume?"

"Certainly, sir."

"And what are you going to do with him?"

"There is no time for a hanging now, and the court has ordered him shot."

"Oh, indeed. And what were the charges?"

"Conspiracy against our government and the success of our arms, by sending a false and misleading despatch containing forged orders, was the particular specification."

"Well," said General Randolph, "I regret to say that the court has been misinformed."

"What!" cried Arrelsford, in great surprise. "The testimony was very plain."

"Yes, indeed, sir," interposed the Sergeant.

"Nevertheless," returned the General, "the man is not guilty of that charge. The despatch was not sent."

Now Edith Varney had scarcely moved. She had expected nothing, she had hoped for nothing from the advent of the General. At best it would mean only a little delay. The verdict was just, the sentence was adequate, and the punishment must and would be carried out. She had listened, scarcely apprehending, busy with her own

thoughts, her eyes fastened on Thorne, who stood there so pale and composed. But at this remarkable statement by General Randolph she was suddenly quickened into life. A low exclamation broke from her lips. A hope, not that his life might be saved, but that it might be less shameful to love him, came into her heart. Wilfred stepped forward also.

The terse statement of the General had caused a great deal of excitement and commotion in the room. Only Thorne preserved his calmness. He was glad that Edith Varney had learned this, and he was more glad that she had learned it from the lips of the enemy, but it would make no difference in his fate. He was not guilty of that particular charge, but there were dozens of other charges for which they could try him, the punishment of any one of which was death. Besides, he was a spy caught in the Confederate lines, wearing a uniform not his own. It was enough that the woman should learn that he had not taken advantage of her action ; at least she could not reproach herself with that.

"Why, General," began Arrelsford, greatly dismayed, "I hardly understand what you mean. That despatch—I saw him myself——"

General Randolph turned on him quickly.

"I say that that despatch was not sent," he roared, striking the table with his hand. "I expected to arrive in time for the trial. There is one here who can testify. Lieutenant Foray ?"

From among the group of staff officers who had followed General Randolph, Lieutenant Foray stepped forward before the General and saluted.

"Did Captain Thorne send out that despatch

after we left you with him in the office an hour ago?" asked the older officer.

"No, sir," answered Foray promptly, glancing from Arrelsford's thwarted and flushed and indignant countenance to Edith Varney's face, in which he saw the light of a great illumination was shining. "No, sir," he repeated; "I was just about to send it by his orders, when he countermanded it and tore up the despatch."

"And what despatch was it?"

"It was one signed by the Secretary of War, sir, removing Marston's Division from Cemetery Hill."

"You hear, gentlemen," said the General, and, not giving them time to answer, he turned again to Foray. "What were Captain Thorne's words at the time?"

"He said he refused to act under that commission, and crumpled it up and threw it away."

"That will do, Lieutenant," said General Randolph triumphantly. He turned to Arrelsford again. "If you are not satisfied, Mr. Arrelsford, I beg to inform you that we have a despatch from General Chesney at the front, in which he says that no orders were received from here. He got an uncompleted despatch, but could not make anything out of it. Marston's Division was not withdrawn from Cemetery Hill, and our position was not weakened in any way. The attack there has failed." There was a low murmur of astonishment from the group of men in the room. Edith Varney did one significant thing. She made two steps in Thorne's direction. That young man did not dare to trust himself to look at her. "It is quite plain," continued the General, "that the court has been acting under an error. The President of the Confederacy is, therefore, com-

pelled to disapprove the finding, and it is set aside. He happened to be with the Secretary when the finding came in."

Arrelsford made one last desperate effort.

"General Randolph," he said, and, to do him justice, he did not lack courage, "this was put in my hands, and——"

General Randolph laughed.

"I take it out of your hands," he said curtly. "Report back to the War Office, or the Secret Service Office, with my compliments, and——"

"But there are other charges upon which he could be tried," persisted Arrelsford. "He is a spy anyway, and——"

"I believe I gave you your orders, Mr. Arrelsford," interrupted the General, with suspicious politeness.

"But hadn't I better wait and see——"

"By God, sir," thundered Randolph, "do I have to explain my orders to the whole Secret Service of the Confederacy? Don't wait to see anything. Go at once, or I will have you escorted by a file of soldiers."

Arrelsford would have defied the General if there had been the least use in the world in doing it, but the game was clearly up for the present. He would try to arrange to have Thorne rearrested and tried as a spy later. Now he could do nothing. He walked out of the room, pride enabling him to keep up a brave front, but with disappointment and resentment raging in his heart. He did not realise that his power over Thorne had been withdrawn. In the great game that they had played, he had lost at all points. They all watched him go, not a single one in the room with sympathy, or even pity.

"Now, Sergeant," said the General, as they heard the heavy hall door close; "I want to speak to the prisoner."

"Order arms!" cried the Sergeant. "Parade rest!" As the squad assumed these positions in obedience to his commands, the Sergeant continued, "Fall out the prisoner."

Thorne stepped forward one pace from the ranks, and saluted the General. He kept his eyes fixed upon that gentleman, and it was only the throbbing of his heart that made him aware that Edith Varney was by his side. She bent her head toward him; he felt her warm breath against his cheek as she whispered:

"Oh! Why didn't you tell me? I thought you sent it, I thought you——"

"Miss Varney!" exclaimed the General in surprise.

But Edith threw maidenly reserve to the winds. The suddenness of the revelation overwhelmed her.

"There is nothing against him, General Randolph, now; is there? He didn't send it. There's nothing to try him for!" she said.

General Randolph smiled grimly at her.

"You are very much mistaken, Miss Varney," he answered. "The fact of his being caught in our lines without his proper uniform is enough to hang him in ten minutes."

Edith caught her heart with her hand with a sharp exclamation, but General Randolph had turned to speak to the prisoner.

"Captain Thorne," he said, "or Lewis Dumont, if that is your name; the President is fully informed regarding the circumstances of your case, and I needn't say that we look upon you as a cursed dangerous character. There isn't any

doubt whatever that you ought to be shot right now, but, considering the damned peculiarity of your behaviour, and that you refused to send out that despatch when you might have done so, we've decided to keep you out of mischief some other way. You will be held a prisoner of war."

Captain Thorne was almost too dazed to realise the purport of the decree. He mechanically saluted, and from his lips broke a murmured,

"Thank you, sir."

The General looked at him severely, and then, seeing Edith Varney, turned away and engaged in conversation with his staff. His intention was obvious, and Edith immediately embraced the opportunity.

"Oh!" she said; "that isn't nearly so bad as death," and before them all she stretched out her hand to him.

"No?" queried Thorne in a low voice.

"No," she said, forcing herself to look at him. "After a while perhaps—some time——"

"Oh!" said Thorne. "Some time? If it's some time, that's enough."

Mrs. Varney, having succeeded in getting Howard quiet and composed, had been in the room since the advent of General Randolph.

"Mamma," said Edith, "won't you speak to him, too?"

Mrs. Varney approached him, but Wilfred was quicker.

"I would like to shake hands with you," he said, with boyish enthusiasm.

"What again?" said Thorne, smiling. "All right." He stretched out his hand. "Go ahead."

"And so would I," said Caroline, following the lead of her boy lover.

"Don't be afraid now," said Wilfred. "Everything will be all right. They will give you a parole, and——"

"A parole!" said Caroline. "Goodness gracious, they will give you hundreds of them, I am sure."

But General Randolph turned once more.

"One moment, please," said the officer. As he came forward, the others fell back. Only Edith Varney kept her place close by Thorne's side. "There is only one reason on earth why the President has set aside a certain verdict of death. You held up that false order and made a turn in our favour. You are not to be tried as a spy, but held as a prisoner of war. We expect you to make that turn complete and enter our service."

"Never," replied Thorne instantly. "That's impossible, sir."

"You can give us your answer later," said the General.

"You have it now."

"You will be kept in close confinement until you come to our terms," continued the older officer.

"You make me a prisoner for life, then."

"You will see it in another light before many days, and it wouldn't surprise me if Miss Varney had something to do with a change in your views."

"You are mistaken, General Randolph," quickly interposed Edith. "I think he is perfectly right."

"Oh, very well," said the General, smiling a little. "We will see what a little prison life will do. Sergeant?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have turned the prisoner over to Major

Whitfield. He requests you to take the prisoner to his office, where he'll take charge of him."

"Very good, sir," answered the Sergeant.

"What is it?" whispered Thorne to Edith. "Love and good-bye?"

"No," answered the girl; "only the first." She stopped and looked up at him, her face flushed, her heart throbbing, her eyes shining gloriously. "And that every day, every hour, every minute, until we meet again."

"Thank God," whispered Thorne. "Until we meet again."

"Attention!" cried the Sergeant. "Carry arms! Left face! Fall in the prisoner! Forward—March!"

AFTERWORD

And so the great adventure is over, the story is told, and the play is played. It is hard to tell who lost and who won. It made little difference in the end that Marston's Division had not been withdrawn, and that the attack on Cemetery Hill had failed. It made little difference in the end that Arrelsford had been thwarted in his attempts to wreak his vengeance upon Thorne. It made little difference in the end that Thorne refused to enter the service of the Confederacy, preferring imprisonment for life. For the days of that Confederacy were numbered. It was even then tottering on the verge of its grave, in spite of the brave front it kept up.

Three days after the events of that night, and Richmond had fallen, and presently the last of the Confederate defenders halted at Appomattox. The Stars and Bars were hauled down for the last time. The Army was disbanded. The prisoners were released. There was a quiet wedding in the old house. Howard, happily recovered from his wounds, was present. General Varney himself gave away the bride—reluctantly, to be sure, yet he did it. Wilfred took the place of the brother of Captain Thorne—to continue to call him by the name he had assumed—and acted as the best man. To whom should be given the coveted privilege of attending the bride but to

Miss Caroline Mitford! And Miss Kittridge and the few other guests, including General Randolph, saw in the younger couple indications that when a few more years had made it suitable, the two who played the second part on this interesting occasion would be principals themselves.

There was much opposition, of course, to the wedding of Captain Thorne and Edith Varney, and many bitter things were said, but there was no restraining the young people. They had lived and suffered, they had almost died together. The years of peace and harmony and friendship that came to the sections at last, and the present happiness that was theirs immediately, convinced even the most obdurate that what they had done was exactly right.

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